AUGUST 1923

EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE

NUMBER 288

Everybody's

FIRST IN FICTION

Miss Rena Decatur
3 Tremont St
Peabody Mass
Oct24

AUGUST
1923
25¢

Chas A MacLellan

A Rafael Sabatini NOVEL complete in this issue

Francis Lynde's powerful story of
A MAN'S REDEMPTION

I. A. R. Wylie, – L. Patrick Greene
Samuel Merwin – Achmed Abdullah
– and others –

NO illustration can truly show you why Smith & Wesson revolvers are actually "Superior." Any dealer will let you examine one, inside and out. Only then will the dependability and accuracy of the arm be apparent. You will realize also, by comparison, why its slightly higher price is justified.

SMITH & WESSON

Manufacturers of Superior Revolvers

SPRINGFIELD
MASSACHUSETTS

Catalogue sent on request. Address Department M

No arms are genuine Smith & Wesson Arms unless they bear, plainly marked on the barrel, the name

SMITH & WESSON, SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Branch Offices: Los Angeles, Cal., Seattle, Wash.
Western Representatives: Andrew Carrigan Company, Rialto Bldg., San Francisco, Cal.

Earned $25 a week
Now Has Fine Home
Money in the Bank
and His Own Car
Earning Over $9000 a Year
Unlimited Possibilities
for making much more

Can Success Like This Be An Accident?

"THE fellows who used to work with me while I was plugging along at $25 a week are convinced that I either had a 'pull' or just 'fell into a good thing'—that my $9,000 a year position is a sheer accident.

"When I told them I had found an easy way to earn big money as a salesman, they laughed at me and called it a 'harebrained idea.' They told me 'salesmen are born, not made.' But I decided to see my harebrained idea 'through.' I was sick of slaving for a pittance.

"I started studying the secrets of master salesmanship as taught by the National Salesmen's Training Association—and almost before I knew it I had confidence to tackle my first selling position. And why not? I had mastered the very secrets of selling used by the most successful salesmen.

"My earnings during the past month were $750. I now have better than a $9,000 a year position—with lots more room to grow. I can state positively that my sudden success was not an accident. It came because I knew how to sell scientifically. And how simple it is to sell when you know how. My regret is that I did not know these secrets ten years ago."—Ellis Sumner Cook, Manufacturers Agent, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Why Not Make More Money?

If you want to get out of the wage-earning class, if you want to make good money without loss of time—then do as Mr. Cook and thousands of others have done.

The secrets of salesmanship which Mr. Cook learned are available to you. There are certain ways to approach prospects, to stimulate interest, to overcome objections, and to close sales. Every move in selling is governed by certain rules. Once you know these success is yours.

Success Like This Yours

Adam Horneber, Bay City, Mich., writes: "I have increased my earning power 500% since I secured your training in the Science of Selling."

Lewis A. Tinnes, Minneapolis, Minn., writes: "When I finished your training, I left my job at $160 a month and took a job as salesman. The first month I made over $600 and I expect to go higher yet."

EMPLOYERS

are invited to write to the Employment Dept. of the N. S. T. A. We can put you in touch with just the men you need. No charge for this service to you or our members. Employers are also cordially invited to request details about the N. S. T. A. Group Plan of instruction for entire sales forces. Synopsis and charts sent without obligation.

F. K. Kramer, Pine Bluff, Ark., writes: "Since studying the N. S. T. A. Course I have increased my earning capacity from $2,200 to over $6,000 a year."

N. D. Miller, 1705 S. Clark Street, Chicago, says: "I place the credit for my success where it rightfully belongs. I owe my present position wholly to the N. S. T. A. In July, 1919, I studied your selling secrets and in September you secured me the position which I now hold. I am earning in excess of $100 a week."

Bear in mind that these stories of real success—the kind that is waiting you in this field of unlimited money-making opportunities—are but a few of thousands on file. You will find scores of them in our literature.

Valuable Book Free

No matter what you may now think, it is only a thought. Get the facts! See for yourself how you can easily duplicate any of these stories of success. NOW and no other time is the minute to mail the coupon below. Our big free book, "Modern Salesmanship," will be mailed promptly. And there's no obligation.

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
Dept. 74-K, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. 74-K, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Send me FREE your book, "Modern Salesmanship," and proof that I can become a master salesman.

Name ....

Address ....

City .... State ....

Age .... Occupation ....

EVERYBODY'S
August, 1923

Published monthly by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $2.50 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Aug. 16, 1899, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Entered as second-class matter at the Post-Office Department, Ottawa, Canada.

Volume XLIX
Number 2

Shawknit
TRADE MARK
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.
FINE
HOSIERY

THERE are several new Shawknit numbers which merit your attention. The little gold label on each pair makes it safe to venture, for behind the pleasing seasonable novelty is the unchanging Shawknit standard of service.

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in life is to make our guests so comfortable amidst surroundings of happiness and cheerfulness, that forever after when they come to Cincinnati they will look upon The Sinton as their home.

And, as they travel from place to place, to judge other hotels using us as a criterion.

Or, to recommend to others the same hospitality that they received.

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MANAGEMENT ~ JOHN L. HORGAN
CINCINNATI

A hotel of character in the city of character

Accommodations for 1200 guests

Every room with bath and servidor

12 DAY Canadian Cruises
New York~Halifax~Quebec

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will make 4 unusually attractive yachting cruises (no freight)

Sailing from New York
JULY 7-21 and AUG. 4-18

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HORSFORD'S ACID PHOSPHATE

feeds the body and tissues nourishment that is *essential to health*, in a form readily assimilable. At Druggists.

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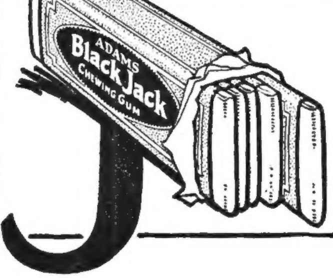
European plan. Excellent rooms, with private bath. $3 a day and up. Reservations are advisable. Exceptional garage accommodations.

"Delicious!"

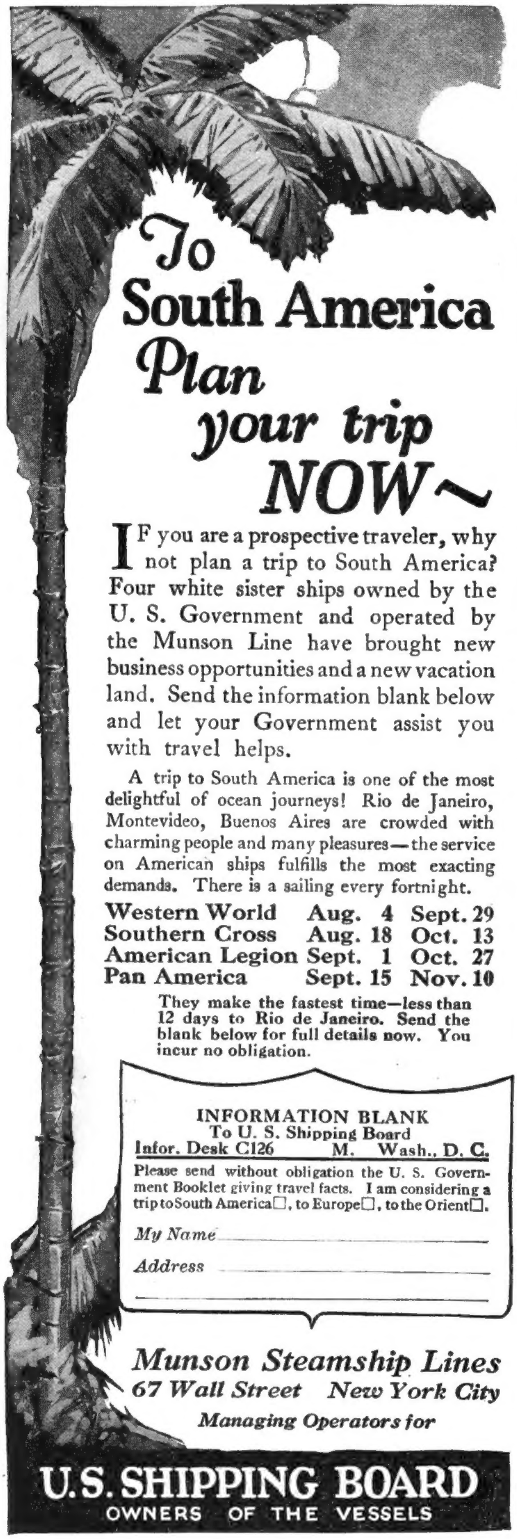
It just melts in your mouth! You're sure to like that "Good old licorice flavor!"

Black Jack

Chewing Gum



American Chicle Co.



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Charcoal is a remedy that the more you take of it the better; it is not a drug at all, but simply absorbs the gases and impurities always present in the stomach and intestines and carries them out of the system.

Charcoal sweetens the breath after smoking, and after eating onions and other odorous vegetables.

Charcoal effectually clears and improves the complexion, it whitens the teeth and further acts as a natural and eminently safe cathartic.

It absorbs the injurious gases which collect in the stomach and bowels; it disinfects the mouth and throat from the poison of catarrh.

All druggists sell charcoal in one form or another, but probably the best charcoal and the most for the money is in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges; they are composed of the finest quality Willow charcoal powdered to extreme fineness, then compressed in tablet form or rather in the form of large, pleasant tasting lozenges, the charcoal being sweetened to be smooth and palatable.

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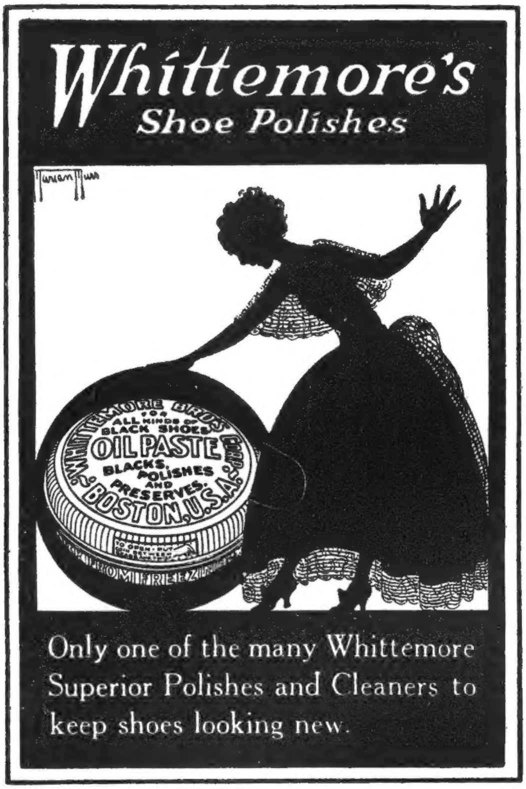

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Only one of the many Whittemore Superior Polishes and Cleaners to keep shoes looking new.

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Don't Hide Them With a Veil; Remove Them With Othine—Double Strength

This preparation for the treatment of freckles is usually so successful in removing freckles and giving a clear, beautiful complexion that it is sold under guarantee to refund the money if it fails.

Don't hide your freckles under a veil; get an ounce of Othine and remove them. Even the first few applications should show a wonderful improvement, some of the lighter freckles vanishing entirely.

Be sure to ask the druggist for the double strength Othine; it is this that is sold on the money-back guarantee.

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Perrin Sold $350 One Day

Meisner, $250 in one day.
Shook, $311 one day Sept. 1920.
Erwins boy (going to school) makes $35 every Sat. afternoon.
Erwin says $6 yields $25.
No theory! No guesswork!
Actual proven record of successes. Send for booklet.

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"I know you would, Bob—think what it would mean to us! It worries me to see you wasting the best years of your life when you could make them count for so much.

"Can't you see it, Bob? Don't you see that the reason men get ahead is because they train themselves to do some one thing just a little better than others?

"If the International Correspondence Schools can raise the salaries of other men, they can raise yours. If they can help other men to win advancement and more money, they can help you, too. I am sure of it.

"Don't let another year slip by and leave you right where you are to-day. Let's at least find out how the I. C. S. can help you. Let's mark and mail this coupon right now!"

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

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☐ Railroad Positions
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Occupation..

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Homer E. Minor
of Texas

"Six months after starting work I cleared $1000. My next ambition was realized a year ago last October when I moved into a home of my own. Cost $7000—built especially for my work.

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Mr. Minor is only one of hundreds who have solved the extra-money problem with our easy money-making plan.

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Please send me, without obligation, full particulars of your money-making plan.

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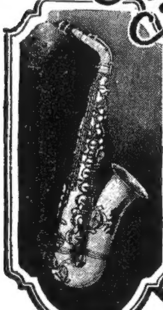

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4 to 1 Against you

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Brush your teeth with Forhan's For the Gums. If used consistently and used in time, it will prevent Pyorrhea or check its progress. As a dentifrice, it will keep your teeth white and clean, your gums firm and healthy. Pleasant to the taste. At all druggists, 35c and 60c in tubes.

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New York
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Forhan's
TRADE MARK
FOR THE GUMS
BRUSH YOUR TEETH WITH IT
FORMULA OF
Specialist in DISEASES OF THE MOUTH
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Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS
More than a tooth paste —it checks Pyorrhea

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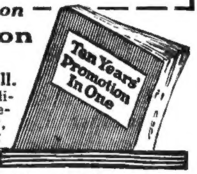
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LaSalle Extension University

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Gentlemen: Send without obligation to me information regarding course indicated below, also copy of your interesting book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One."

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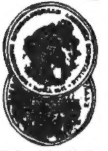
Name..

Present Position ....

Address...

Stop Using a Truss


Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

Reduced Fac-Simile
Grand Prix.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made **self-adhesive** purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached**—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We **prove** it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**

Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY**

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Name ....

Address...

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.......................

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Only $3 DOWN

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CHICKS S. C. Reds 12 cts. B. P. Rocks 11 cts. S. C. W. Leghorns 9 cts., and Mixed or off color chicks 7 cts. These chicks are all from free range stock. Safe delivery and satisfaction guaranteed. Booklet free.

W. A. LAUVER - - McAlisterville, Pa.

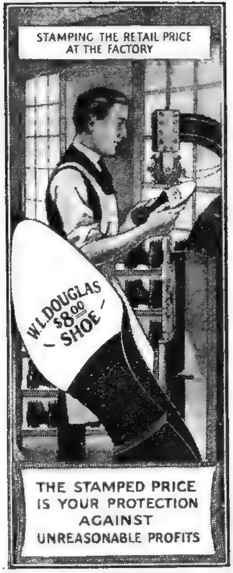
W. L. DOUGLAS

NAME AND PORTRAIT

is the best known shoe trade mark in the world. It stands for the highest standard of quality at the lowest possible cost. For economy and satisfactory service, wear shoes that bear this trade mark.

W. L. DOUGLAS **constant endeavor for 47 years has been to make reliable, well made, stylish shoes at reasonable prices. The satisfactory service and the protection afforded by the name and price stamped on the sole of every pair have given the people confidence in W. L. Douglas shoes.**

If you have been paying high prices for shoes, examine the W. L. Douglas $7.00 and $8.00 shoes. They are exceptionally good value and will give you satisfactory service.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W.L.DOUGLAS $8.00 SHOE
THE STAMPED PRICE IS YOUR PROTECTION AGAINST UNREASONABLE PROFITS

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ESTABLISHED 1876

$5. $6. $7. $8. & $9. SHOES FOR MEN & WOMEN

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W. L. Douglas factories at Brockton, Mass., examine the high grade leathers used, and see how carefully good shoes are made by skilled shoemakers under the supervision of experienced men, all working with an honest determination to make the best shoes that can be produced for the price.

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Perhaps you haven't decided *how* you'll spend your vacation this summer. But whether it's at the mountains or the shore, in the country or in the big cities—you know *how much* you'll have to spend.

Of course you can always dig into your savings. Most of us do. But we know scores of men who *don't*—who pay for their summer vacations every year without touching their bank accounts.

Paul Johnson, for example, plans to have the "fishingest two weeks of his life" in the Adirondacks—entirely on the money he has earned since March as a special representative of *Everybody's*. All Johnson has done is send us the new and renewal orders of his friends and neighbors. Easy as "rolling off a log"—and profitable to the tune of liberal commissions and a *regular salary*.

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Please send me, without obligation, all particulars concerning your practical money-making plan.

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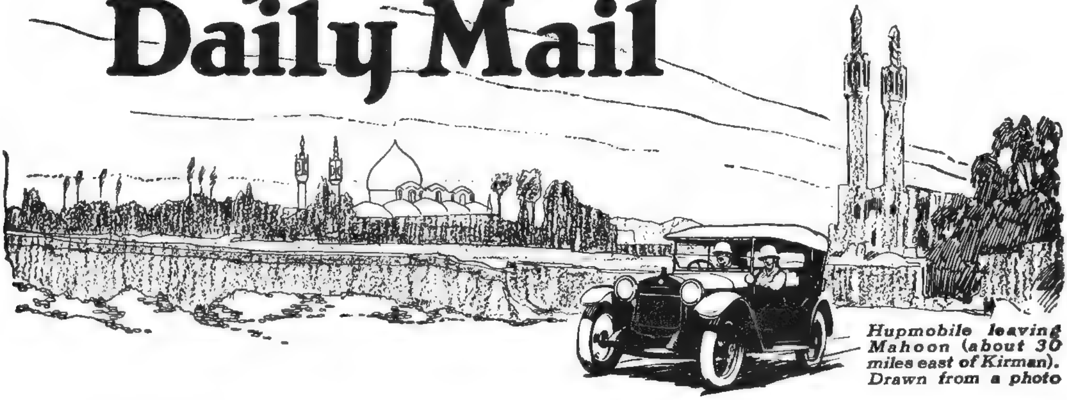
Hupmobile Daily Mail



Hupmobile leaving Mahoon (about 30 miles east of Kirman). Drawn from a photo

The whole world is on tip-toe with interest in anything that concerns the Hupmobile.

This is again evidenced by the letter below. Last fall, we noted in an advertisement the trip of three Hupmobiles over perilous stretches in Persia.

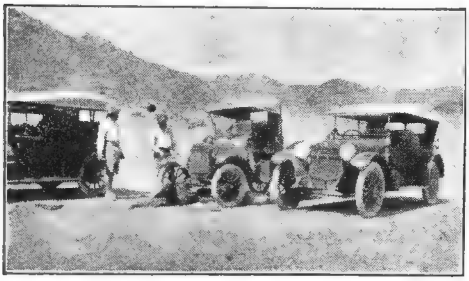
Captain Merrill was a witness of the successful termination of that journey. When our announcement appeared, he was on service at Camp Meade.

The performance of these Hupmobiles far from home is only typical of Hupmobile performance everywhere on the face of the globe.

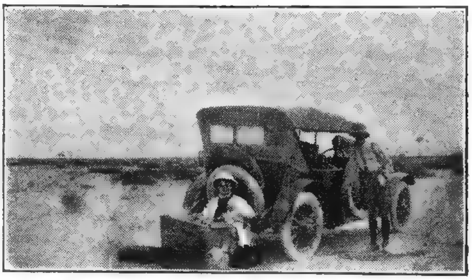
It emphasizes the dependability which puts so much certainty into adventure that it almost ceases to be adventure.

Camp Meade, Md.
September 7, 1922

I recently saw a full page advertisement in a magazine of the journey made by several Hupmobiles from Nushki to Kirman in Persia. As I was on the spot in Kirman when the machines arrived, it has occurred to me that you may be able to use the enclosed photographs. The following incidents may be useful to you.



Hupmobiles enroute, Kirman to Shiraz



Stop for lunch—about 100 miles south of Kirman

On the entire trip to Kirman, Sergeant Cox told me that even over the rough desert country he had only one puncture; also the cars went much farther than Kirman. After a few days' rest they went on to Shiraz; i. e., some of them—some 350 or more miles. One of the cars took me as far as the road went towards the Persian Gulf, about 225 miles below Kirman, over a bare desert, dry water courses, stones and sand.

JOHN N. MERRILL
Capt. 2nd Cavalry

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Everybody's

NUMBER TWO AUGUST, 1923 VOLUME XLIX

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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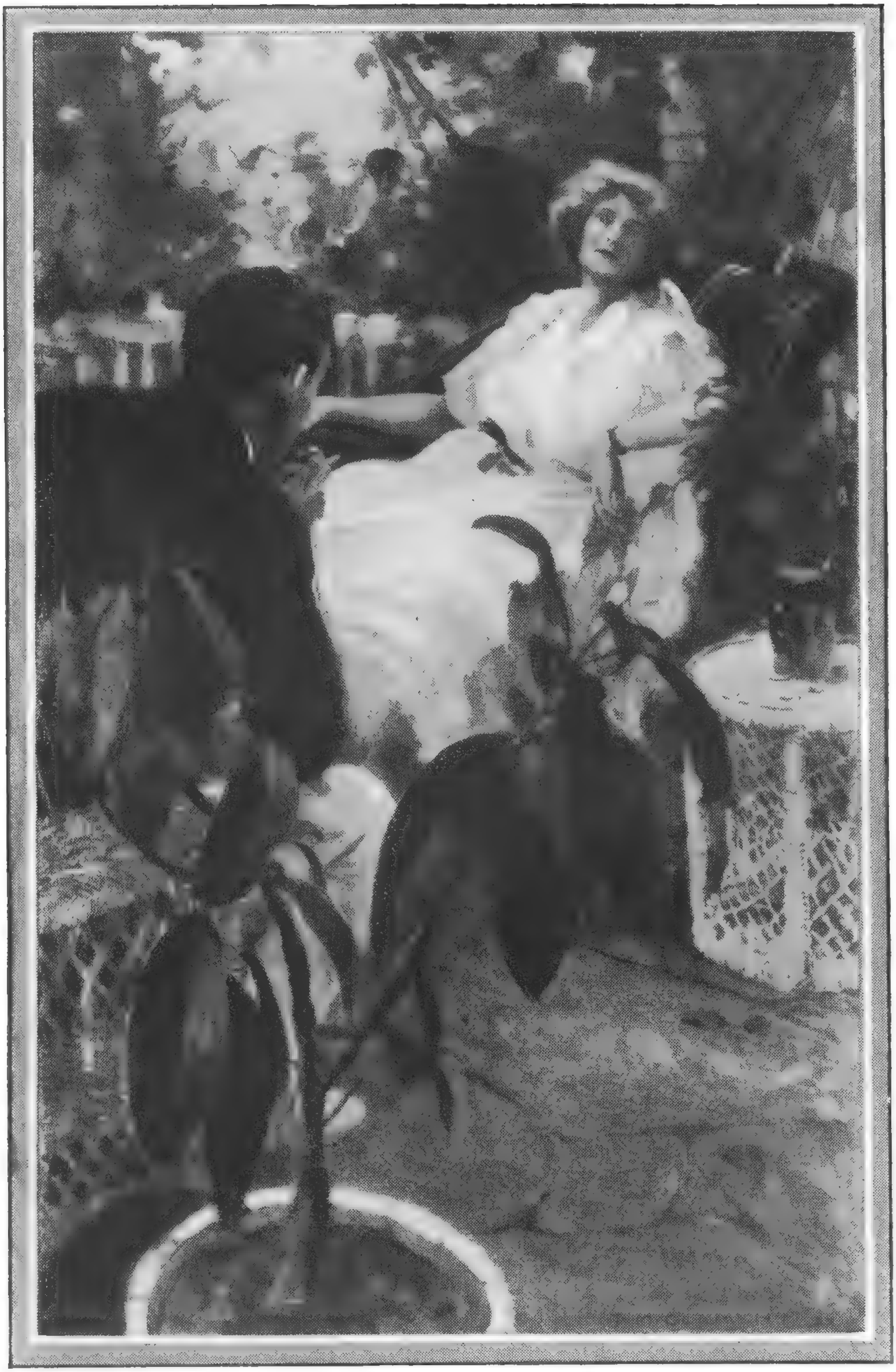


The young woman gave prompt assurance that she belonged to her own generation. "If it's fit to tell a man, you needn't hesitate to tell me."

An Enthralling Story of a Derelict's Redemption

Mellowing Money

Isn't Sudden Fortune Always Ruinous? This Question Was Put to Francis Lynde, an Author Whose Score of Novels Has Made Him Well Known. "Is It?" He Rejoined. "Let's See." And with the Pondering of The Question This Story Was Begun. It Is a Very Human Working-Out of a Not Unusual but Always Difficult Problem—the Sudden Assumption of Grave Responsibilities

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Real Man," "The Wreckers," "Pirates' Hope, etc."

Illustrations by J. M. Clement

LIKE other expert travelers, Griffith usually slept well enough while his train continued in motion; and since the one in which the empty grain-car was a unit was a through freight, he had been disturbed only a few times during the five hours between midnight and dawn. It was barely daybreak when a stop for a country railroad crossing roused him, and as he was about to go to sleep again the high, square ventilating door at the forward end of the car was shoved aside to admit a man's legs. Quickly following the legs came the sturdy figure of the man entire, to alight springily upon the car floor—a well-muscled young fellow with a brakeman's cap pulled down over his cropped head, and a voice like a steam-siren to rasp out contumely and a peremptory command:

"Hey there, you damn 'bo! Thought you'd put one over on me when you hopped us in the yard at Cinci last night, didn't you? But I lamped you all right. You got us wrong. This ain't the Hobo Limited. Out you go!"

The train was jangling over the crossing-frogs, and Griffith gathered his legs under him to get up. It was not the first time by many that he had found himself at cross-purposes with the existing order of things as typified by a bellicose train brakeman. Ordinarily he gave the ejective trainmen little trouble. Vagrant philosophy having been carried to a point at which one stopping-place was much the same as another, why should he demur if some inhospitable member of a train-crew wished to save him the trouble of choosing for himself?

But, there be times and seasons differing. The last hip-pocket bottle he had shared with a brother down-and-out in the Cincinnati railroad yard had held liquor of the colorless variety which breeds blood-feuds in its native mountains, and the fusel-oil taste of it was still in Griffith's mouth. So the slow uprising became a stiffening leap afoot, with knees flexed to catch the lurching swing of the car, and his retort was a challenge:

"I'm out when you put me out!"

Though the belligerent young brakeman thought to make it so, the battle was neither short nor sweet.

"If you pull a gat on me I'll kill you," he warned, and made his rush. By all odds that should have settled it. The brakeman

Copyright, 1923, by Francis Lynde

was farmer-husky and full-fed, and Griffith was neither. But out of a past which was daily growing more indistinct and befogged, the vagrant dragged some memory of the days when he had captained his college football team, and the memory served to stop the brakeman's rush with a hook to the jaw which, if Griffith had been able to put the weight of a series of square meals behind it, would have ended the fight.

AS IT was, the blow merely made the younger man swear and change his tactics. The side door through which Griffith had swung aboard at midnight was still open, and the brakeman, sparring for his chance, circled warily to get his antagonist with his back to the doorway. Twice Griffith slipped aside when an attack, however clumsy, would have driven him backward out of the moving car, and at each dodging evasion he contrived to get in a short-arm jab under the brakeman's guard. Convinced painfully by the jabs that his advantage lay in superior strength and not at all in trying to match himself against the hobo's skill, the young husky put his head down and closed for a grapple, taking his punishment like a man as he pressed in to the decisive clinch.

After that it became bald caveman stuff. Griffith, unstrung by three years of self-imposed hardship and dissipation, went down in the grip of the cleaner man, and, locked in the grapple, they rolled together on the floor of the car. Slowly the younger wrestler got the better of it in this sheer pitting of strength against strength, inching Griffith in each fresh struggle nearer and nearer to the open door. Two or three times Griffith twisted himself half free, but his wind was going and he knew it was only a matter of seconds. Through the open side door came the shriek of the locomotive whistle sounding the call for a station-passing signal; there was a chuckling of drawbars and a clanking of switch-frogs under the wheels as the train slowed to the passing-speed. Then,

"Damn you!" grunted a panting voice at his ear. "I told you you'd go out, and out you do go!"

And the next instant Griffith found himself plowing the old familiar furrow in a bed of cinders at the track-side.

For such an interval as was filled by the passing of the remainder of the long freight, Griffith lay gasping, the fusel-oil combinations and hard living constraining him. But by the time the caboose had flicked under the station semaphore he was able to sit up and look round. Sunrise was threatening, but a shadowy mist had crept up overnight from the valley of a little river whose course was marked by a double fringe of willows on its banks. Through the translucent mist-veil a tidy brick station building loomed on the opposite side of the tracks, and when Griffith made out the lettering on its sign:

CIN. 97 MI.—BETHSAIDA—CHI. 206 MI.

he hugged his knees and swore painstakingly and earnestly. For Bethsaida, the Bethsaida lying ninety-seven miles from Cincinnati and two hundred and six from Chicago, had been the one place he had been most careful to avoid in all the shuttlings to and fro of the three years of vagabondage.

Pressed to give a reason for the avoidance, he would have offered it readily enough, and it would have been at least a half-truth. Having sunk himself in a deep pit of indifference as to his points of contact, human or geographical, he still cherished a settled hatred for his birth-town and all it connoted. Its narrow outlook upon life, its hamperings, religious and moral, its hypocritical worship of "means"—certainly these were enough to make any outcast son of Bethsaida hate the place and avoid it.

Hence, in all the vagabond wanderings, growing less and less purposeful with each aimless, drifting shift, Bethsaida had been given a wide berth. There were many railroads, and only one of them led through the town of rasping memories. This being the case, he called it one of the little ironies of life that in a great-city railroad yard, where there were any number of midnight freights making up, he should chance to pitch upon the only one that was pointed toward Bethsaida, and that a pugnacious brakeman should throw him off at the one place he would have tramped miles to circle.

This thought was at the bottom of the cursings. But the sour moroseness of the confirmed derelict had not yet entirely submerged Griffith. There were still some rags and tatters of a saving sense of humor when the liquor was out and the wit was in, and he was grinning hardily when he got up to beat the cinders out of his clothes.

"But, after all, why not Bethsaida, as well as any other place?" he said, tacking the query on as an addenda to the curses. "I don't suppose it will be any harder to get a drink here than in any other joint within a few hours' run of the Canada boundary. Now that I'm here, through no fault of my own, I may as well stay a while and give the old town the sappy luxury of being able to point to a 'horrible example.'"

Crossing the tracks in the gray morning light, he climbed to the station platform. In the bay window where the telegraph instruments were sat the night operator, who had not yet been relieved—a young fellow, smug, decent, and with his black hair plastered back in a wet-seal roach. As befitted a railroad man and a despiser of hoboes, he gave Griffith a scowl.

Griffith hunched his shoulders and went on round the building, grinning again. One of the small ameliorations in the vagrant years had been this spiteful attitude of the railroad employees—or, rather, his own success in circumventing it when he desired a change of scene.

AT THIS early hour Bethsaida, the well-behaved, was still asleep. But across from the station Griffith saw the little box-on-wheels lunch-kitchen of the Greek, Petropaulos, and it was lighted. Griffith felt in his pockets and drew forth a scattering of small coins. There was enough to pay for a frugal breakfast, and he crossed the small open square and let himself into the stifling interior of the lunch-box.

For a moment the fat little man sweltering over the gasoline-stove stared in round-eyed amazement. Then,

"Meestare Griffith!" he stammered.

"No, Pete; not 'mister' any more; just plain 'Arch' to anybody who cares for a monniker, and 'that damn tramp' to other people. You don't, by any chance, happen to have a drop of anything to drink on the premises, do you?"

The fat little man put up his hands as one warding a blow.

"In dees town-a? They make-a me in jail so queeck——"

"I see." Griffith nodded. "All right; hot dog and bread, and a cup of your near-coffee. And let the coffee come black."

For the time it took him to devour three of the tiny sausages with bread and to gulp down two cups of the coffee, Griffith was silent. But afterward, when he had rummaged in his pockets and found a single cigarette,

"Any changes in the dead-alive old town, Pete?"

"Nossing. Business is bad—verree bad."

"I suppose so. It never was much of anything else, as I remember it. *Daily Telegraph* still alive?"

"The pepper? Oh, yes! Meestare Macallaster will be the *rédacteur* now." Petropaulos lapsed into French now and again when he could not remember the English word.

"Hm," said Griffith, frowning. "Old Amos Whittlesea's right-hand man in the bank. I take it Whittlesea gathered the *Telegraph* in after dad died?"

The little man's shrug was far more Gallic than Greek.

"That Meestare W'ittlesea take all—everyt'ing. Bam-by he own the 'ole town—yes."

Griffith drew deep inspiration from the crumpled cigarette and made the sign of complete understanding. There were few pies in Bethsaida in which Amos Whittlesea, president of the Bethsaida Security Bank, had not had a finger in Griffith's boyhood, and it would be worse now. Every year must have seen the old miser's clutch tightening upon the small resources of the country town and farming region round about. It was in Griffith's final college year that a new vault had been built in the Bethsaida Security, and people were saying that it was because the old vault was no longer large enough to hold the mortgages old Amos had accumulated.

The little Greek was not often curious with his customers, but he ventured a single question as Griffith got down off his stool and moved to go.

"You'll been come out from the army, Meestare Archer?"

Griffith nodded shortly.

"Three years ago—just after dad died." Then, abruptly, "Who is living in the old place now?"

"Your papa's? Thees Meestare Macallaster."

Griffith went out with his fists deep in the pockets of his frayed and dusty coat. He saw how it was. Amos Whittlesea had taken not only the *Telegraph* but the home place as well. There had probably been debts enough to warrant the clean sweep. The vagrant was willing to admit that his father had been a poor business man, as lacking in the money-nerve as he had been gifted as a student of men and events. And with his purse-strings untied—always untied.

TAKING the cross-street leading up from the station square, Griffith presently found himself in the heart of Bethsaida. The town had changed little in outward appearance since he had last seen it. The single business thoroughfare—for a wonder it was Maple Avenue and not Main Street—ran out in a straggling suburb of workmen's cottages across the railroad tracks two squares to the right, and at the same distance to the left merged by degrees into the chief residence street. Griffith read the familiar signs: "Pott & Wilgrow, Hardware;" "The Brown Emporium, Dry Goods and Notions;" "Joe Ingleburt, the Live Druggist;" "Hotel St. Nicholas;" "Tony Schiff's Tonsorial Parlor;" "Cartwright & Clemmer, Everything for the Household." On the next corner to the left rose the tall, slate-shingled spire of the one down-town church, the Baptist, and across the street, as if in hardy defiance of the church, a two-storied brick building bore the sign: "Tom's Place—Billiards and Pool."

The corner from which the returned exile had this refurbishing view was occupied by the bank. Taking Amos Whittlesea's reputed wealth as a measure, the Bethsaida Security should have been housed in the handsomest building in town, but the dingy one at which Griffith turned to look had the same inconsequent, weather-worn appearance that it had presented in former years, with its shabby front rather emphasized than relieved by the plate-glass windows and their gold-leaf signs.

Griffith was absently reading the gilt lettering when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he wheeled, as at a touch that he had come easily to recognize, spun round and found himself facing a pursy, red-faced, elderly person with portentous eyebrows and mustaches, becapped and clothed in the epauletted glory of the small-town peace-officer. Griffith recognized Cappy Maitland as a constabulary landmark of his boyhood and youth, but it was evident that Maitland did not recognize him.

"Now, then—now, then! Who be you, and what you doin' here?" was the fashion in which the blustering inquisition began. "I c'n tell you right now, young feller, Bethsaida ain't no place f'r tramps—no place a-tall. We send 'em up f'r thutty days and put 'em to work on the streets. You gotta have money if you're goin' to stay in this town. Show up! How much have you got on you?"

With a recrudescence of the trampish grin, Griffith fished in his pocket and brought up three coppers.

"Ha-ha!" snorted the majesty of the law "Just about what I thought! You come along with me and I'll put you right where you'll do the most good to your feller creeturs. How many guns you got on you?" And he ran his fat hands over Griffith's person. "None, hey? Reckon you had to pawn it to buy your last drink o' bootleg. All right; you come along with me, and we'll see if we can't make you willin' to clear out o' Bethsaida when you get a chance."

For a moment Griffith had some faint notion of resisting. The tussle with the brakeman had stirred a long-dormant cell somewhere at the bottom of his brain, and the crude injustice of the arrest rankled as he had thought nothing of that nature could rankle for a man who had clasped hands with injustice in all its protean shapes. But the militant prompting passed quickly. Now that he was in Bethsaida—and by no wish of his own—he would take in silence what Bethsaida had to offer him. Possibly in the future, if there was to be any future, it would enable him to stay sober enough at moments of train-boarding to make sure that his box-car Pullman was not headed toward the detestable home town.

The march to the town jail was a short one, and after he had been locked up, Griffith ran true to form. There was an iron cot in the cell, and assuming that some hours must elapse before anything else would happen to him, he flung himself down to finish the sleep interrupted by the inhospitable brakeman.

It was still quite early in the forenoon when the pursy town marshal roused his sleeping prisoner and haled him before the Bethsaidan bar of justice—otherwise into Magistrate Joel Bradbury's stuffy little office in the fore-room of the jail. Griffith remembered the old magistrate perfectly. His father and the *Daily Telegraph* had often helped to elect and reelect Bradbury to the office, which he had held as far back as Griffith's memory ran. But the justice was old and short-sighted, and he failed to recognize in the shabby, unshaven young vagrant before him the son of his stanch friend of other days. So Tom Archer—Griffith gave only two-thirds of his name in the questioning—was awarded the limit—thirty days in the street-repairing gang.

EARLY in the evening of the day in which Griffith had been given his introduction to the Bethsaidan pick-and-shovel squad, two young people sat talking on the porch of an old-fashioned, vine-covered house in upper Maple Avenue—a house of the sort the successful Middle-Western farmer builds when he rents his farm on shares and moves to town to give his children the benefit of better schools.

Of the two, the young woman sitting in the hammock swung across the end of the porch was the daughter of the house—the only child of her widowed, ex-farmer father. Being of pioneer stock which has had at least three generations in which to ripen and develop, she had her dower of wholesome beauty together with the clear-eyed, undismayed gaze of the daughter of to-day whose outlook upon life has been broadened by contacts denied to the women of yesterday and the day before.

The young man, whose serviceable business-car was parked at the curb, was also a type of his own day and generation—well set-up and athletic, handsome in a manly fashion, but with a look in the good gray eyes and certain lines about the firm mouth that were the marks of the sudden maturing process to which so many young men were subjected in the forcing-plant of the great war.

"As I say, I've been fighting it all summer and trying to make myself believe that it is nothing but a lack of adjustability in me"—it was the young woman speaking—"but I'm afraid it is hopeless. The four years in college have spoiled me for Bethsaida—or Bethsaida for me."

The young man nodded sympathetic comprehension.

"I had a tussle of the same sort three years ago when I came back from France and took hold again in the shop. Whatever else may be said for it, the war was broadening. The tin-basin trot of Bethsaida in a business way is rather maddening."

"I wasn't thinking so much of that," the young woman said. "Of course, we are little in a business way, and that can't very well be helped. But in other ways—Why, John, the point of view of the whole world has been built over in the past five or six years, and ours—Bethsaida's, I mean—hasn't changed a particle. We are just the same little purblind, gossiping, holier-than-thou set that we have always been. You know it as well as I do; only, you are too easy-going or indifferent to care."

"Which means that some one of the 'holiers' has been rubbing you the wrong way again. Was it Mrs. Wilgrow?"

"Not this time. It was Aunt Mary Pettiman. We were down-town, shopping, this afternoon, and you know how they are tearing up the pavement in River Street to put down water-pipes or something. As I was edging the car past the obstruction, I had a positive shock. One of the shovelers in the ditch looked startlingly like Arch Griffith—not Arch as we used to know him, but a shocking, disreputable caricature of him. Of course it was only my imagination; but after we got by I told Aunt Mary what it was that nearly made me kill the motor, and that started her off."

"About Archer?"

"Yes. She seemed to know a lot more about him than I did—or do—and there wasn't anything too bitter for her to say. That is why I left the note at your office, asking you to come up this evening if you had time. I want to know how much of Aunt Mary's hot-pitch pouring is true, and I thought maybe you could tell me."

John Kingsley shook his head.

"You hadn't heard? That is because you have been away and out of touch. I guess Arch went to pieces pretty thoroughly, and when the news of it got round, the gossips made the most of it, as a matter of course."

The younger woman stopped the slow swing of the hammock with the toe of a neatly shod foot.

"But he was in France with the army, wasn't he? Didn't somebody tell me that he won the *Croix de Guerre?*"

"Sure! He was down in New Mexico on some engineering job when the call came, and he dropped things in a hurry and broke into the first officers' training-camp. He went overseas quite early in the game."

"Did you see anything of him over there?'

"No; but that isn't singular. He was in the engineers and I was in the artillery. The only time I heard of him was when he was cited for rebuilding a bridge under fire. That was the last word I had of him until after we were mustered out."

"And then?"

"I hate to tell you the rest of it, Margie; it's hardly fit for you to hear. Besides, I don't know all the details, or how much Arch was to blame. There was a girl in it."

The young woman smiled and gave prompt assurance that she belonged to her own generation.

"You are a little tarred with the Bethsaidan stick yourself, John," she said. "If it's fit to tell a man, you needn't hesitate to tell me."

"All right—if you put it that way," Kingsley returned. "My information came second-hand, but I guess it's pretty straight. You remember Bainbridge, who was on the 'varsity with Arch in the final year at old Sheddon? He was the one who told me. We happened to meet when I was in New York last summer. Mind if I smoke?"

Margery Stillwell's pretty lip curled in smiling derision.

"You know well enough that I don't mind. But you also know what Bethsaida thinks about cigarettes and cigarette-smokers."

"I know the town commissioners have been silly enough to pass an ordinance making it a crime to sell cigarettes. I suppose they'll want to prescribe the number of cups of coffee a law-abiding citizen may drink with his breakfast next. But about Archer. You were only a high-school kid at the time, but you must have heard a lot about the way the women—and the men, too, for that matter—acted when the fellows were going overseas. There were hundreds of foolish marriages made on the eve of sailing."

This time Margery Stillwell did not smile.

"Archer did that?" she said, with a little catching of her breath.

"So Billy Bainbridge said. He—Bainbridge—didn't know the girl or anything about her at the time, but it turned out that she was an adventuress—one of the sort who would marry any soldier for the sake of getting him to split his pay with her. I can't imagine what Arch was thinking of, but he was probably knocked over by a pretty face and the asinine sentimentality of the time."

"And what came of it?"

"A mighty bad jolt—if Bainbridge had it straight. It seems that the girl corresponded with Archer all the time he was in France. When he got back to New York he found that she had married two other soldiers on the pay-instalment plan—whether before or after her marriage with Archer, Bainbridge didn't know—and that she was living with a fourth man upon whom she had no legal claim whatever."

"Poor Archer!" said the young woman. Then, "There is nothing too bad to happen to a woman who would do such a thing."

"But that wasn't all," Kingsley went on. "Bainbridge said that before Arch could fairly get his feet on the ground, he learned that his father had died a few weeks earlier and that the *Telegraph* and the home place had been mopped up slick and clean by the debts of the estate. On top of that came failure to get a job. Conditions at that time were a good bit mixed. We were at the top of a boom, but there was very little new work going on—construction work—in Arch's line. Men were pouring in from France by the thousand, and nobody knew just how the business cat was going to jump. For weeks Arch haunted the employment agencies, living harder and harder, I suppose, as his money dwindled, and eventually the bottom fell out."

"I don't know what you mean by the 'bottom falling out.'"

KINGSLEY was silent for a full minute before he tried to explain.

"It's pretty tough," he said at length. "I can't seem to flog myself round to the point of believing that Arch dropped all the way through into the underworld. Yet it is a fact that he was tried in a New Jersey town for complicity in a burglary, and was acquitted because there wasn't sufficient evidence to convict him. Bainbridge met him once after that—found him hoboing somewhere in Illinois—and offered to help him. He said Arch merely swore at him and walked away."

Margery Stillwell's comment was a natural one—coming from a young woman who had been away from Bethsaida for four years.

"Why didn't he come home to his friends —to people who knew him?"

AGAIN Kingsley was silent, and when he spoke it was to ask a question.

"How well did you know Archer in the old days?"

"Why, I think I knew him as well as any one of us younger girls did. Perhaps a little better than some of the others. Living right here across the street from him——"

"I know," said Kingsley, his gaze going across to the modest, two-storied frame house half buried in an overgrown shrubbery of lilacs and snowballs and spiræa on the opposite side of the street. "But you were too young, and too busy in high school to mix and mingle much with the bunch of us just ahead of you. After Archer's first or second year in college, Bethsaida the righteous didn't take much stock in him. You may remember that his father was—well, he wasn't a church-member, and——"

"Wait!" said the young woman, with a little squaring of the shoulders. "You are going to say that people called his father an atheist. Maybe he was. I never knew anything about his religious views. But I do know that a more kindly, lovable gentleman never lived. Now go on."

"I was merely going to say that Bethsaida saw Archer as a brand *not* snatched from the burning, and was given to quoting Scripture over him—texts like, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Perhaps Arch justified some of the condemnation; I don't say that he didn't. He was inclined to be what Mrs. Wilgrow called 'wild'—drank a little, played cards a little—though not much for money at that time, I think—played Kelly pool at perhaps a quarter a corner, wasn't above backing his preference, either in horses or boat-crews or box-fighters, with a modest bet. Of course, all these things established his reputation as that of a lost soul in the eyes of Bethsaida."

"Of course. But none of these things really spoiled him. It was left for a woman to do that."

Kingsley shook his head.

"I don't believe I'd put it quite as strongly as that," he deprecated. "I am a man, but I'm fair enough to women to say that the worst of them can't break a man unless he lends a hand himself. You see, I'm not making any excuses for Archer."

"No; but I am!" came shotlike from the vine-shaded darkness enveloping the hammock. "I know some things about Arch Griffith that you don't seem to know, John. You spoke a little while ago of his work in New Mexico just before war was declared. In my freshman year in college I knew a girl whose brother had been Archer's assistant in whatever project it was they were working on. I met the brother a few times, and he could never say enough in praise of his former chief. Hearing him talk, I knew that however much Arch had let down in his college years, it hadn't spoiled him as a man."

"All right," said Kingsley, as one well satisfied to have his own—and the Bethsaidan—point of view contravened. "I like your loyalty to the under dog. Poor Arch probably needs it, wherever he is or whatever has become of him." Then, after a longish pause, "Was there anything else you wanted to ask me about him?"

"No."

"Then perhaps you'll let me say a word or two for myself. Two weeks ago you turned me down for the third time, Margie; but I can't let go. When I found your note this afternoon, asking me to come——"

"Please!" she pleaded. "Let's not go over it all again, John. I know you said my reasons were no good, but they are. There is one question, at least, that a woman must always ask herself, and until the answer to that can be 'Yes,' all the other answers have to wait."

"I know what you said about the 'defenseless intimacies'—wasn't that what you called them? But I can't understand. If I were repulsive to you in any way—but you say it's not that."

She shook her head.

"No; I suppose it is what our grandfathers and grandmothers called 'love.' I haven't felt it yet, John. You are as near to me—and as dear—as any man can be—now.

And I want to keep you that way. But I can't unlock the door, even to you. Something inside of me keeps on saying, 'No, no, no; you'll spoil his life as well as your own.' They tell us we have outlived the age of sentiment, and perhaps we have. But we shall never outlive the primal sex-impulse. We may gloze it over all we please—the other generation *did* gloze it over and prudishly made believe to ignore it—but that is what brings two people together in marriage—or it would better be. If it is lacking, there is nothing left but tragedy."

Kingsley stood up.

"What your college has done for you is a-plenty," he commented mildly. And then: "I guess I'm still a bit old-fashioned. I can't begin to understand your point of view—the modern young woman's point of view—on these sex things. But I'm willing to learn—and to wait. It's a mighty fine night. Don't you want to take a little spin in the old 'bus?"

The young woman had slipped out of the hammock to go to the porch steps with him.

"Not to-night," she refused gently. "I think—I guess what you've been telling me about poor Arch Griffith has made me too sorry to be able to enjoy a spin—or to help you enjoy it. Good-night, and thank you for coming."

AS THOSE of a prisoner, set to work out a sentence of vagrancy in the town where he had been born, Archer Griffith's emotions—if one who has reached the nadir of human descent in the social scale may be allowed the luxury of emotions—were grimly humorous. That he would be recognized sooner or later there could be no doubt. The fat little Greek of the luncheon-wagon had know him at once, and there would presently be others—many others. He told himself that he didn't care, that he was without shame. And the trampish grin wrinkled again at the corners of his eyes when he saw how his arrest and punishment would add edge to the suddenly formed design of giving Bethsaida something new and particularly horrifying to be shocked at.

There were titillating ramifications to these prefigurings. Picking and shoveling in a ditch ask little of a restless brain, and as he dug in his section of the street-trench, he tried to ignore a nagging and growing thirst for stimulants by presaging the righteous indignation which would flame out when the story of the returned but shamelessly impenitent prodigal was passed from lip to ear. Aunt Mary Pettiman, for example. In his mind's eye he could see her thin lips draw themselves into a straight line as she bit out her anathema: "Disgusting! Disgraceful! The most abandoned wretch of the gutters would have more decency about him than to come back and flaunt his degradation in the face and eyes of the town where he was born."

Then there was Abel Harriford—Deacon Harriford, smug, strait-laced, a "pillar" in the church—Harriford, and—oh, dozens of others. Griffith could picture the deacon striding wrathfully into Justice Bradford's jail court-room and demanding to be told why Bradford had not recognized the prodigal at once and had him shipped out of Bethsaida instead of parading him in the streets on a vagrancy sentence.

Some few familiar faces Griffith saw in the first day's ditch-digging, but not as many as he thought he would. The war had not left even the Bethsaidas of the country wholly unchanged, and there were new faces to be seen, taking the place of some older ones that would never more be seen in Bethsaida or elsewhere. The street in which he labored was a square aside from Maple Avenue, and there was comparatively little traffic—less than usual, because of the trenching obstructions. Oddly enough, though he had glanced up when Margery Stillwell was easing her car past the obstructions, he had not recognized either the young woman or her aunt. But as to this, Margery had leaped from girlhood to womanhood in his absence, and the glass of the wind-shield had blurred his brief glimpse of Mrs. Pettiman.

It was not until the second day that Griffith learned that Bethsaida had discovered him. His nearest work-mate in the trench, an Irish laborer—not a prisoner—gave him the news.

"Say, buckie—what the divvle was ailin' ye to come hoboin' back to yer own town?" was the form the news took; and Griffith knew that the leaven of gossip had begun to work.

"Why not?" he asked. "Isn't one town as good as another?"

"Yis; but the shame of ut, man! Yer father lived and died here, and 'tis a good name he left behind him. And 'twas here ye growed up."

"What do you know about it?" Griffith queried.

"Nawthin' but what I'd be hearin' 'em tell in Dickerman's grocery lasht night. 'Twas a-plinty. They'll not be letting you stay in this town twinty-four hours afther yer sentence is up, I'm thinkin'."

"May be I sha'n't ask permission to stay."

"What ailed ye to come at all, then?"

"I was down on my luck," said Griffith shortly. "A better man than I am threw me out of a box car yesterday morning as the train was passing through."

"And what would ye be doin' to get yerself jugged the minute ye hit the town?"

"I committed the capital crime of standing in front of Whittlesea's bank, waiting for the sun to rise. I suppose I ought to be thankful I didn't get ten years in the pen."

" 'Tis a har-rd nut ye are, I'm thinking," said Patrick Mulligan, and thereafter he let his work-mate severely alone.

LATER in this same second day Griffith found himself momentarily isolated. As nearly as he could determine, he was the only town prisoner in the pipe-laying gang, and from the beginning there had been little attempt made to guard him. The old town marshal brought him to work in the morning, and came after him at quitting-time; otherwise, the sole surveillance was that exercised by the bullying foreman, and at the isolating moment when a call was sent along the trench for help to lower a section of the water-pipe into place, he was ignored.

While he was swinging his pick in his place at the ditch-end, he saw a woman slip out of the back door of Tom's Place and cut across the street toward him. At first he did not recognize her; then he saw that she was Tom Gaffney's daughter, Roxanna, whose promise of black-eyed, Gipsylike beauty had burgeoned and blossomed luxuriantly since the time when, as a half-grown girl, she had brushed tables and racked balls for all comers in her father's pool-room. Before he could look twice, she was beside him.

"It is you, then, after all, is it, Archie Griffith?" she began, without preface. "I saw Cappy bringing you over this morning, and I thought I spotted you. What you been doing to get yourself in the chain-gang?"

"Hoboing," returned Griffith briefly.

"How long are you in for?"

"Thirty days."

"It's a dirty shame—and in your own town, at that! Why don't you cut and run for it? They're giving you chances enough. You've got one this minute, while they're putting that pipe down."

"Perhaps I haven't anywhere to run to."

"Listen," said the girl; "you know the old Stebbins place—out on the Willow Springs road?"

"Yes."

"It's a road-house now—ours. They'll not look for you there—if they take the trouble to look for you anywhere. Wait until just before quitting-time—just before Cappy Maitland is due to show up for you—and then make a break for it. Run straight down the street to the river-road. I'll be waiting with the car."

Griffith grounded his pick and looked up at her. For a man who had definitely broken with the higher ideals, the dark-skinned, eager face, with the lustrous black eyes, the flushed cheeks, the red-lipped mouth which was only now beginning to take on shadowy lines of hardness, had its appeal. In a townful of people, many of whom must by this time have identified him, it was left to this young woman, who, in Bethsaida's eyes, could be little better than an outcast, to offer to take him for what he was, and without question.

"Why, Roxy, girl?" he asked.

"Why not?" she retorted.

"A dirty, unshaven tramp, with three copper pennies in his pocket," he catalogued, with a grim smile. "You might aim a good bit higher, Roxy."

"Leave it to me!" she snapped back. "As if I didn't know what a bath, a shave and a few glad rags'd do for you! I'm not forgetting the old days, Archie, when the other little college-lads'd be making game of me whilst I'd be racking the balls for 'em. 'Twas you gave me the first clean kiss I ever had."

Griffith resumed his pick. The heavy section of pipe had been eased into the bottom of the ditch, and the shovelers were straggling back to their places in the trench.

"Maybe I'll give you another some day," he laughed; and then: "I'll think about the break-away. Skip out—before the big Swede pipes you off talking to me. I don't want to have to brain him with this pick—not right now."

For some little time after the girl disappeared Griffith was more than half inclined to consent to her urgings. There was little doubt that the simple plan of the break-away could be safely carried out. To be sure, there would be a hue and cry raised, and quite possibly some attempt made at pursuit; but since his offense was only that of vagrancy, the attempt to recapture him would be no more than half-hearted. It was some measure of the distance he had fallen that no thought that he would be indebted to Tom Gaffney and Gaffney's daughter came to trouble him. He knew well enough what the transformed farmhouse on the Willow Springs road stood for. With national prohibition in the saddle, Gaffney no longer dared to make his town pool-room a masked gambling-resort or a place where liquor could be had by those who knew the formula. So he had opened the road-house well beyond the town limits.

After all, it was a sudden recrudescence of the attack of impish perversity that made Griffith throw away his chance to escape when it came. The opportunity, if he had chosen to call it so, was fairly thrust upon him. At the critical moment, when the other laborers were returning their tools to the street-box and preparing to go home, the town marshal did not appear. Halgren, the Swedish foreman, grinned at Griffith.

"Aye tank you'll bane got to valk back to da yail by yourself, Meester Hobo," he drawled; and thereupon Griffith was left standing quite alone by the deserted trench.

It was then that the impish perversity returned. A brisk dash down the short cross-street would have brought him to the river-road, where, he made no doubt, Roxanna Gaffney was waiting with an auto. But the freedom thus obtained was to be had only at the price of removing the smirch which fate, a scrappy brakeman and Cappy Maitland had conspired together to put upon the fair fame of Bethsaida. Griffith saw the pursy figure of the town marshal turning the corner half a square distant, and, calling up the grim smile again, he crossed the street to be taken once more into custody by the majesty of the law.

LATE that evening, after he had eaten his supper in the jail kitchen and had been locked into his cell for the night, Griffith heard a double shuffle of footsteps in the corridor, and a minute afterward the cell door was opened to admit John Kingsley. In the reviving of memories more or less dulled by the years of vagabonding, he had overlooked Kingsley, or, at least, had failed to recall the fact that his sometime college classmate had inherited the Star Foundry and Machine Works and was probably a fixture in Bethsaida. He was stretched upon the cot when the cell door was opened, and it was another measure of the passed mile-posts that he made no move to get up when Kingsley entered. The visitor was the first to speak.

"You needn't try to bluff me, Arch," he said. "They say you have a grudge against the world, but you can't stretch it to include me."

Griffith locked his hands under his head.

"Why can't I?" he asked, with an ironic grin.

"Well, chiefly because I don't deserve it—if only for the sake of old times. Though everybody else in town seems to have known that you were doing time in the street-gang, it was less than an hour ago that I heard of it. Why on earth didn't you shout for me when they arrested you?"

"Who told you?" Griffith inquired, passing over Kingsley's comradely question.

"Margie Stillwell."

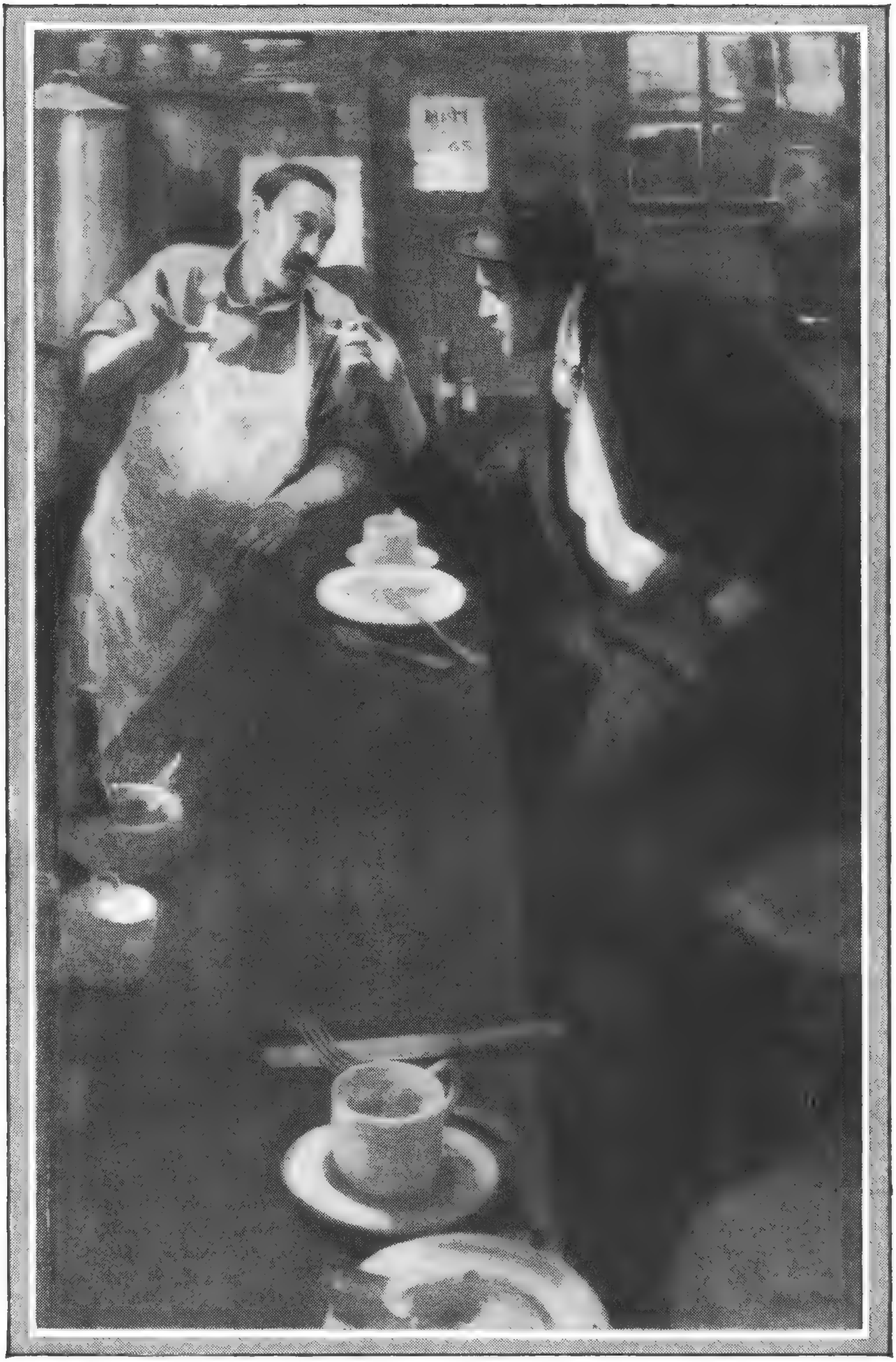
"Margie Stillwell," said Griffith musingly. "She was just a little girl when I saw her last. What is she now?"

"A very beautiful woman," Kingsley replied gravely. "But you haven't told me why you didn't let me know you were in trouble. Surely you owed me that much, Arch."

"Why should I call upon you, or upon anybody? The old brass-buttoned town marshal had the right hunch. He arrested me as a vagrant with no visible means of support, and that is precisely what I am—a hobo—a bum."

Kingsley waved this aside impatiently.

"You can't be, you know—not while you are in the same town with me. And old Cappy Maitland didn't recognize you. If



The little man's shrug was far more Gallic than Greek. "That Meestare W'ittlesea take all—everyt'ng. Bam-by he own the 'ole town—yes."

he had, he wouldn't have pulled you in. Why didn't you tell him?"

Griffith sat up and consented to argue the case.

"See here, John; you've got me all wrong. If you've read your Bible recently enough you may remember that the Prodigal Son came back because he jolly well wanted to. I didn't. I'm in Bethsaida only because a damnable bit of luck happened to me."

"You didn't intend to come back?"

"Nothing like it—nothing remotely like it. Two causes contributed to the fatal disaster. When I swung a freight in the Cincinnati yards, two nights ago, I was too nearly stewed to know—or to care much—which way the train was headed or what railroad it was on. Calling that cause number one, cause number two was a thick-chested young brakeman who heaved me out of my box car as the train was slowing through Bethsaida. If I had known where I was, I should have climbed that train again—or lost a leg trying to."

KINGSLEY made a quick gesture of impatience and paced a nervous turn in the narrow confines of the cell.

"Archer, where should a man hole in when he's out of luck if he can't come back to his own home town, I'd like to know?" he demanded. "But there's no room for argument here. I have fixed this vagrancy thing up with Bradford, and the charge against you is crossed off the books. I'm here to take you home with me."

"Not in a thousand years!" was the prompt refusal. "I know Bethsaida too well. I'm not out to blacklist Mrs. Kingsley socially for all time."

Kingsley laughed rather mirthlessly.

"There isn't any Mrs. Kingsley—more's the pity! She—the only 'she' there is—won't have it that way. I've broken with Bethsaidan traditions and set up a bachelor establishment in the old house. Uncle Rastus makes the garden and cuts the lawn and washes the car, and Aunt Miranda cooks for me. We're gossip-proof."

Griffith shook his head as one who saw no inducement in the description of the bachelor establishment.

"Stuffy luxury. You don't know how much you can do without—how little a man really needs to keep body and soul in touch—until you try, John. I haven't slept in a civilized bed since Adam wore knee-breeches." Then, soberly: "It's no use. If I had come back here intending to try to brace up, it would be different. But I haven't. I'm just an accident. Let it go at that. You say you've knocked out the vagrancy charge. Tell me what time the night freights pull through here, and to square accounts with you I'll forego a certain little diversion I had promised myself and vanish over the horizon."

"A diversion? What kind of a diversion?"

"I owe this hypocritical town something for the environment it provided for my tender years, and for the way it pointed its damnable finger at my father because he believed what he had to believe and refused to kowtow to the great god of 'means.' I had it in mind to pay a little of that long-standing obligation."

"Pay Bethsaida? In what way?"

"As the spotted hand paid Lady Macbeth. As the soiled outside of the platter and the cup offended the rotten-hearted Pharisees. I thought I'd like to be a blot upon the immaculate surface of this town long enough to even things up a bit."

"Nonsense!" said Kingsley. "You are only talking to hear the sound of your own voice when you say things like that. Get your coat and come along out of this. I'm not going to let go of you now—not if you should go on vaporing until midnight."

"Just one minute more," said Griffith. "You are a pretty decent chap, John, or, at any rate, you used to be. It is going to cost you something in this strait-laced town if you take me in."

"It will cost me nothing that I value."

"All right; that's that. One other thing remains to be said: Don't count upon anything like gratitude from me. As I told you a few minutes ago, I'm a bum—in all that the word connotes. If you have any fugitive notion that by taking me in and doing for me you are going to reform me, carve it out and throw it away. There is nothing to it; nothing left in me that you could appeal to if you should be foolish enough to try. More than that, I shall probably shock and disgust you at every turn. I haven't lived like a dog for the past few years without acquiring the characteristics of the dog. Like the cur in the fable, I might even bite the hand that feeds me."

"Rot! Tommyrot!" said Kingsley in generous derision. "You'd like to have me believe that you're a devil of a fellow, wouldn't you? It doesn't go. I've known you too long and too well. Put your coat on and come along."

"One other minute," Griffith put in, as he reached for his coat. "You don't happen to have a pocket-flask in your clothes?"

Kingsley looked him over shrewdly.

"No; but I have one at the house. You shall have a drink when we get there. Come on!"

Two minutes later the jail doors had opened for the derelict, and he was climbing into the spare seat in Kingsley's car.

THE town gossip, already stirred by the spectacle of the son of the former owner of the *Daily Telegraph* picking and shoveling in the streets as a town prisoner, was given an additional impetus on the morning of the third day when it became known that Griffith had disappeared, was no longer a muddy unit in the pipe-laying squad in River Street. At first it was asserted that he had broken jail and escaped. Next it was rumored that somebody with the good name of the community at heart had paid his fine and shipped him out of town. A little later it became definitely known that the fine had been paid by John Kingsley and that Kingsley had taken Griffith away in his auto.

It was not until the following day, however, that the whole mortifying truth came out. The Pettiman house at the head of Maple Avenue was next door to the old mansion which Kingsley had turned into a bachelor apartment. Quite early in the morning, when Mrs. Pettiman was sweeping her back porch, she saw a strange man smoking a cigarette in the Kingsley garden, apparently looking on idly while old Uncle Rastus spaded one of the beds. Mrs. Pettiman's eyesight for objects at a distance was not very good, but there was an old brass-barreled spy-glass in the house, and she soon had it leveled upon the lounging figure in the Kingsley garden. After some little trouble with the focusing she got the cigarette smoker fairly in the field of the small telescope. There was no mistaking the clean-cut, virile and rather satanically handsome face, freshly shaven and somewhat thinner than the well-remembered face of the one-time college athlete, but still the same. The Pettiman telephone was on a party line, and in less than an hour a good half of Bethsaida knew that John Kingsley was making a house-guest of the freed tramp, and that the tramp was wearing a suit of John Kingsley's clothes.

Most naturally, with a cherished reputation for respectability to sustain, Bethsaida was once more stirred profoundly. At the Dorcas Sewing Circle meeting that afternoon in Mrs. Abel Harriford's back parlor, nothing else was talked of.

"I am astonished at John Kingsley—astonished and disappointed. I thought he had better sense." Thus Mrs. Wilgrow, wife of the junior partner in the hardware store, a large, square-faced lady with portentous eyebrows. "I know they were together in college, he and Archer Griffith, but that is no earthly reason why he should harbor a tramp and keep him here to be a disgrace to the town."

"No reason in the wide world!" snapped another member of the circle, a thin-lipped spinster of uncertain age. "Something will come of it—you mark my words—something will come of it, just as sure as the world stands."

"And he used to be such a bright boy," said a little old lady with soft gray hair, as she bent over the garment she was cutting out.

"Mph!" sniffed the deacon's wife. "I didn't see anything very bright about the way he used to act when he'd come home from college, playing pool or billiards half his time—and cards, too, so they said. I always heard he was one of the fast set in college—the drunkards and gamblers."

"I don't quite understand how that could be," put in the little old lady with the soft hair. "When my John was in college he used to tell me that the men on the athletic teams simply *had* to keep straight and not dissipate. And Archer was a footballer."

"It doesn't make any difference what he used to be; it's what he is now—a low-browed, dirty, shifty-eyed tramp," insisted the thin-lipped lady of no-matter-what age. "As long as he is in town I, for one, shall see to it that the doors are double-locked, and I mean to turn the dog loose in the house at night. Why, wasn't it in all the papers that he was tried for being a burglar in some place in the East?"

Though not a member of the sewing circle—being out of it both by reason of the age- (or youth-) limit and by inclination—Margery Stillwell had come as a guest with her Aunt Pettiman, and as she listened a small pink spot came to burn in either cheek. "So hard—so wickedly uncharitable!" she murmured to the garment she was basting. "I wonder how they can ever say the Lord's Prayer."

"Since John Kingsley has seen fit to take him out of the hands of the law, it is his place to get rid of him," Mrs. Harriford decided magisterially, and the roomful of women seemed, with only two or three silent exceptions, to agree with her fully. "I shall speak to Abel about it and have him go to John. Why, we might all be murdered in our beds, for all John Kingsley cares!"

There was more of it—a desolating deal more of it—and when Margery had all she could stand, she excused herself on the plea of a purely fictitious engagement and went home militantly indignant. Her first care, after she entered the house, was to call up Kingsley at his office; and since her house telephone was not on a party wire, she told him about the rod that was in pickle for him. And her language, if they could have heard it, would have shocked the members of the Dorcas Society quite as vigorously as Griffith's advent had.

"It was so spiteful and mean and hard-hearted and *little!*" she exclaimed. "You'd think each one of them had a bitter, personal grudge to satisfy. I know you'll say they are only a lot of tabby-cats, but just the same they can scratch and bite, and they will if you give them half a chance." Then: "I didn't know until I heard them talk that you had taken Archer home with you. What are you going to do with him?"

Kingsley made an indefinite reply, which was the only one he could make. Griffith was as yet an unsolved problem. And if Bethsaida were determined to cold-shoulder him and drive him forth, the problem became doubly unsolvable.

"Well," the hot-hearted one concluded, "you have my sympathy, and you may have my help if there is anything, any least little thing, that I can do. Only, please do keep me in touch."

It was in the shank of this same afternoon that Abel Harriford, primed by telephone at the close of the Dorcas meeting, drove to John Kingsley's office at the foundry and machine works in his rusty little car. Kinglsey, well aware of what was coming, braced himself when he saw the deacon climbing out of his car backward, as his habit was. He had known Harriford all his life, but never before had the deacon's funereal face, with its projecting jaw and deeply sunken eyes, looked so forbidding.

"I TAKE it you can purty well guess what I've come for, John," was the way Harriford began, after he had taken the chair at the desk-end. "What you're doin' is ag'inst all reason and decency, and you can't afford no such flyin's-out ag'inst public opinion. If you feel that you've got to do suthin' for Arch Griffith—though I don't for the life of me see why you should have any call to—why, just put him on a train and pay his way to some place where people don't know him as well as we do here."

"Wait a minute, Deacon, and let's thresh this thing out a bit," said Kingsley, with the soft pedal firmly held down. "We'll begin by admitting that Archer came here as a tramp—a hobo—and that he was arrested and put to work because he had no visible means of support. We'll even go farther and say that it is his own fault that he became a hobo. But, admitting all this, hasn't he some little claim upon the town where he was born and brought up, and where his father was an honorable and upright citizen?"

Harriford shook his head.

"You're talkin' like a paid lawyer afore a jury, John, and you know it. Arch Griffith's worse'n any common tramp; he's a jailbird—or, if he ain't, he'd ought to be."

"As to that, I suppose all hoboes are more or less familiar with the inside of a jail," Kingsley conceded. "It seems that we made haste to show Archer the inside of ours, at any rate."

"That ain't what I meant," Harriford thrust in. "I know, and you know, and the hull town knows that if he'd got his deserts in that burglary trial in New Jersey a while back, he'd be in the peniten'chry this very minute."

Kingsley frowned at this. He had thought he was the only person in Bethsaida who knew the story of the New Jersey incident, or, at least, that he had been until he had shared it with Margery Stillwell. But it seemed that in some way it had become public property.

"I can't agree with you there, Deacon," he ventured. "Archer was acquitted at the trial, as you may remember."

"Yes; because they couldn't find evidence enough to convict him under the law—that's all," the deacon countered quickly. "But you can't tell me he wasn't mixed up in that burglary. Where there's a smoke there's bound to be some fire. If Arch Griffith hadn't been runnin' with thieves and burglars and such, he wouldn't 've been took up and tried."

"That may be true, but, admitting it, we must still remember that this New Jersey incident is ancient history in a way, Deacon," the younger man put in placably. "The outstanding facts are that Archer wasn't convicted, and that as yet he has done nothing to make Bethsaida deport him. At any rate, I can't consent to do as you suggest—put him on a train with a ticket to somewhere else—at least, not until he wishes to go. He is my friend and classmate, and I have done nothing for him that he wouldn't do for me if the case were reversed. I'm quite sure of that. And I'll add this"—the Kingsley temper, slow to assert itself, but sufficiently warm when it was fairly roused, was beginning to glow—"at the present time Archer Griffith is my guest, and whatever Bethsaida sees fit to do to him will be done to me as well."

"Umph!" said the deacon, rising to go. "You're talkin' now like a mad boy. All the same, if you don't get rid of Archer Griffith, you'll live to rue it; that's all I got to say." And he shuffled out to his car, climbed in and drove away.

FOR the first few days after his release from the street-gang, Griffith luxuriated lazily as Kingsley's house-guest, eating the bread of charity, wearing Kingsley's clothes and drinking, though somewhat sparingly, from the small stock of emergency liquor that Kingsley had laid in before the drought settled down upon the land. What exercise he took was taken vicariously by lounging in the garden and looking on while the old negro man dug and weeded—this, or by playing solitary pool, right hand against left, on the combination billiard-table for which Kingsley had made room on the second floor of the old house by throwing two of the spare bedrooms into one.

For occupation betweenwhiles there were books—an old library gathered by Kingsley's grandfather and father, with little in it more modern than the middle third of the nineteenth century. Without troubling himself to think much about it, he knew he was only waiting for a recurrence of the itching restlessness which would again send him adrift, and he was mildly surprised that its coming was delayed.

With the abrupt change from vagrant hardships to comfort and comparative luxury, he found the impish prompting to horrify Bethsaida diminishing its urgency. Viewed simply as a diversion, it took the aspect of a small game and hardly worth the candle. What was it to him if his native town chose to regard him as a hissing and a reproach—did, or did not? Nothing, he told himself—less than nothing. The world was wide, and Bethsaida only an infinitesimal pin-prick upon its surface.

This semiphilosophical attitude was easily maintainable as long as the luxuriating impulse lasted. But the first time he stepped outside of the Kingsley enclosure, the sardonic prompting returned in full force. It was again the day for the weekly gathering of the Dorcas Sewing Circle, and the place, this time, was the Pettiman house, next door. Before Griffith could get the gate latched behind him he had been met and passed by four elderly women who had known him from his childhood. And each one of the four had walked round him, nose in air and face averted, as if he were an incarnation of the black plague.

After this, he walked down-town, with a sour smile displacing the trampish grin. At the Baptist church he crossed the street to Gaffney's place, lit one of Kingsley's cigars and lounged in the Gaffney doorway, being minded to see to what proportion of the passers-by—men and women—he would be invisible. When this palled upon him he went inside and asked Gaffney for a drink. The pool-room proprietor, a hard-eyed, heavy-faced man, with no claim to be called the father of his Gipsy-beauty daughter, shook his head.

"You'd ought to know better than that, Arch," he protested. "It'd be as much as my life's worth to give you a drink here. Where you been keepin' yourself?"

"Since I got out of jail, you mean?" Griffith inquired, with the crabbed smile in place. "Hasn't it been the town talk that John Kingsley paid my fine and took me home with him?"

Gaffney's nod was barely perceptible.

"That'll be all right. But what fetched you back here to the old burg?"

"Ask the town, and it will probably tell you that I'm waiting for a chance to burglarize a few houses, or Whittlesea's bank—or perhaps it has already told you."

Gaffney did not say whether it had or had not. Instead, he asked another question:

"Down on your luck these days?"

Griffith threw out a coin and pointed to a particular box of cigars in the show-case.

"That's Kingsley's money," he remarked, by way of answering the luck question.

Gaffney drew out the box of cigars, and when Griffith had taken the two to which the carelessly flipped coin entitled him, the hard-faced man tossed out two more.

"On me," he grunted; and then, "Goin' to stay with us a spell?"

"An hour ago I thought I shouldn't; but now I guess I shall. Why?"

"I was just wonderin' if you could riffle the pasteboards as handy as you used to."

Griffith laughed, but the laugh was not quite pleasant to hear.

"Haven't you learned that it isn't worth while to beat about the bush with a damned tramp, Tom? Spit it out. What do you want?"

Gaffney shook his bullet head.

"About this burglar lay they're chatterin' about—is there anything in it?"

"You wouldn't expect me to go round advertising it if there were, would you?"

"But they say——"

"I know perfectly well what they are saying, and that is what leads me to say that I think I'll hang round a while."

The hard-faced one nodded.

"I'll stake you to a few," he offered.

"How?"

Gaffney leaned over the show-case and whispered hoarsely.

"This damn town's a frost," he complained. "What it hasn't done to run me out ain't worth talkin' about—see? But I fooled 'em. Bought a place out on the Willow Springs road—automobile lunches, and that lay. Get me?"

"Sure!" Griffith assented. "With a little bootleg on the side, and a few rooms upstairs where the boys, and maybe the girls, can play a quiet game of old maid or seven-up or something of that sort."

"You're on! But the house ain't makin' enough."

"I see; and you want a capper—some fellow who can sit in on a game now and then and make sure that the house gets its rake-off—and maybe a trifle more. Is that it?"

"You might be readin' it out of a book."

Griffith laughed again.

"You are a perennial surprise to me, Tom—you and your kind. You are always looking for a man who will be honest to you and a crook to everybody else. Don't you know that there isn't any such animal?"

"To hell with that!" said Gaffney. "If I'm willin' to take a chance on you, what difference does it make? Is it a go?"

"I'll think about it and let you know," said Griffith, and he left the pool-room to continue his stroll down the avenue.

SINCE even the Bethsaidas change more or less with the passing of the years, the faces into which Griffith looked during that first afternoon saunter were not all recognizable, though many of them were. By making still larger demands upon the starved sense of humor, he was able to extract a certain amount of sardonic amusement out of the casual contacts with former and, in many instances, lifelong acquaintances. Some, like the four good ladies at the Kingsley gate, emulated the example of the priest and Levite in the parable and passed by scrupulously on the other side. Others stopped and said unmeaning commonplaces, greeting him, as one may say, with the head on the shoulder and primed for flight if censorious eyes were caught looking on. Still others offered sham cordiality, handsomely ignoring the curtain-raising episode of the ditch-digging sentence passed upon the returned exile in Justice Bradford's court.

"Well, well, Archer! This is certainly a surprise! First time you've been back since the war, isn't it?"—gas-shells of this nature, hurled only to cover a hasty withdrawal.

Griffith was not deceived. Hard experience had gifted him with a measure of clairvoyance, and it was not difficult to read the poorly masked embarrassment and insincerity lying behind the forth-putting of strained neighborliness. In the acute cases it pleased his humor to hold the greeting victim as long as possible. It was mildly diverting to witness the strugglings to escape and to prolong them.

In the course of time the sidewalk drifting brought him back to the vicinity of the Security Bank. As he turned aimlessly into the cross-street he saw Kingsley's auto standing at the curb in front of the side entrance, which opened into Amos Whittlesea's private office. Griffith, pausing on the opposite side of the narrow street to light one of the Gaffney gift cigars, let his gaze go past the standing auto and into the room beyond. As he looked he saw Kingsley get up out of his chair at the end of Whittlesea's desk and begin to pace the floor, with his hands in his pockets.

By shifting his position a little, Griffith was able to get a better view of the old banker. Apparently the few added years had not changed Amos Whittlesea in any notable particular. It was the same hard-lined face with its cropped gray beard and its crown of bushy white hair, the same bony, grasping hands clasped over one knee in the attitude well known to every needy borrower in Bethsaida, the same ill-fitting pepper-and-salt clothes that seemed never to be renewed.

The banker was evidently waiting for Kingsley to reach a decision of some sort, and Griffith studied the fierce-eyed old face thoughtfully. It was, as Griffith's editor father had once remarked, the face of the best hated man in Bethsaida. Griffith recalled the remark as he stood looking on at whatever little drama it was that was staging itself in the small office-room across the street—remembered it, and told himself that it had stopped short of completion. For unless Amos Whittlesea's ruthless grinding of his poor debtors were the outgrowth of mere mechanical avarice functioning automatically, there was good reason to believe that the hatred was returned in full measure.

Griffith did not linger to see the conclusion of the scene in which Kingsley was apparently an unwilling or, at least, a hesitant actor.

Having squeezed the sour lemon of his first social contact with the home town measurably dry, he sauntered on to the head of the avenue. What under-depths, muddied or other, had been stirred by the contact, who shall say? But that the sense of impish humor was again uppermost might be argued from the slow grin that came and went now and again, presumably at the recollection of some of the points of contact—the reluctant hand-shakings, the forced heartiness of certain of the greetings, the head-on-the-shoulder wariness of some others.

THE final troubling of the waters, if the vagrant years had left any Siloam pool in him to be troubled, came as he reached the Kingsley gate at the head of the street. The sewing circle at the house next door was just disbanding, and once more he found himself an object invisible, or, rather, a thing to be avoided with averted gaze and a drawing-aside of skirts, as if the mere passing touch might be contaminating. Purposely he fumbled the gate-latch. When all was said, these women were the molders of public opinion in Bethsaida, and their attitude was an earnest of what Bethsaida had to offer a returned—and impenitent—prodigal. With the half-bitter, half-sardonic prompting to the fore, he was minded not to abate one jot or tittle of his offending by a too hasty retreat.

He was lifting the gate-latch and swearing softly to himself as the last of the groups edged past him, and he did not see a little old lady with soft white hair and a face that was at once a benison and a gentle mask of sorrows borne bravely and made to yield their finest fruitage of loving sympathy until she spoke to him.

"Why, Archer!" she said, holding out a thin hand that he tried at first not to see, and then took in both of his own. "I've been hoping that I'd see you somewhere. It does seem so good to have you back with us again. So many of our boys and girls go away and never come back. You are stopping here with John? That's nice; John is such a good boy."

"John *is* a good boy," he said, not knowing what else to say. Then, "And you, Mrs. Cantrell—you are still living in the old home?"

"Yes; all alone, Archer, now. Alice is married and living in Wisconsin, and Mary's husband is building railroads in Brazil, and my John is in business in

Denver. John wants me, and so does Alice; but I can't seem to make up my mind to leave the old place."

"Naturally," Griffith acquiesced, still not knowing what to say. But his heart warmed generously toward the widow of his father's oldest friend.

"It is a sad home-coming to you, Archer, in a way—I know it must be," she went on, "with your father gone and all, and strangers living in your old home place. But you mustn't be downhearted. And you must come and see me right soon, won't you? I want you to tell me all about what you did in France and how you won the *Croix de Guerre*. My John told me you did, you know."

When she had gone on, Griffith walked up the flagstoned path to the house with his head down and his hands buried in the pockets of the Kingsley coat he was wearing. He would have been less than human if the gentle old lady's kindly greeting had not touched him. But later, after he had gone into the house to fill one of Kingsley's pipes out of a jar of Kingsley's tobacco, and was preparing to bury himself in a musty old volume of Fielding taken from the Kingsley shelves, he was telling himself morosely that one swallow did not make a summer, and that the net result of the afternoon abroad could be summed up, after all, in an easily demonstrable equation: respectable Bethsaida would have none of him. This was the plus half, overwhelmingly self-evident. And the minus half was Tom Gaffney's offer.

BETHSAIDAN custom, immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, clung to the early dinner-hour of the 'Eighties and 'Nineties, and it was only a little after sunset in the evening of the day when he had first shown himself on the streets of the home town as Kingsley's pensioner that Griffith followed his host to the porch to smoke an after-dinner pipe in the open. Asked at the dinner-table what he had been doing with himself, the derelict had answered that he had been reading Fielding; and after the pipes were lit he still made no mention of the manner in which he had spent the great part of the afternoon.

In the evenings, which they usually spent together, Griffith had volunteered no confidences, and Kingsley had asked none. But now, for the first time, he broke over.

"A week ago, Archer, you gave me to understand that you had it in for the world at large," he began. "How is it by this time?"

Griffith tamped the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe and applied another match.

"Isn't it pretty safe to assume that the world hasn't changed much in a week?" he asked.

"The world? No. But you?"

"I am a part of the world."

"Clever, but unsatisfactory," was Kingsley's retort. "You know very well what I mean. If you don't want to talk along that line, say so, and we'll drop it."

"I'm willing to talk. What do you want me to say?"

"I'd like to hear you say that you were talking through your hat that night in the jail."

"But I wasn't, John," was the sober reply. "The idea I tried to shoot into you then was that any man who has reached the stage that I have reached isn't worth bothering with."

"I guess you'll have to prove that."

"I am proving it now, by living here at your expense, wearing your clothes, eating your food, drinking your liquor, smoking your tobacco and spending your money. That I can do all these things without shame shows that I have become that most hopeless of all the different varieties of human junk—a man who has parted with the final shreds of self-respect."

Kingsley smiled.

"You should have been given the degree of Litt. D. instead of that of B. Sc. in Civil," he commented.

"Meaning that I am overdrawing the picture?"

"Meaning that you are embellishing it out of all reason."

"I am not, John. I'm not talking to hear the sound of my own voice, nor have I pulled the cork of your bottle of Scotch an undue number of times since I got out of bed this morning. What I am telling you is the sober truth. A man may go far on what Bethsaida would call the 'downward road' and still have that within him which will enable him to turn back. But there is a mile-post somewhere along the road beyond which he can't turn back. He will have committed the unpardonable sin, which means, simply, that he has lost whatever it is in mind or heart that creates a desire for better things."

"More piffle — sophomoric piffle, this time," Kingsley derided.

"No! Wait. We used to be pretty close together in the old days, John. I wonder if I ever told you my dreams in those days?"

"If you did, I have forgotten them."

"Debt—my father's debt to Amos Whittlesea—was the biggest thing I remember in my boyhood. It was a shadow that was always hanging over me—over all of us in the home place. Dad printed a good country paper—the best in its class, I used to think and still think—but he never made it pay. He was too easy with everybody. After a few years I began to learn that the shadow hanging over us at home was an almost universal shadow in Bethsaida and the country round about. The mortgage, the 'dead pledge,' was like a subtle poison spreading everywhere, corroding everything it touched, turning the good in its victims to bad, and the bad to worse. And old Amos Whittlesea, banker, miser, usurer, was the master poisoner.

"It was this that made me dream my boyhood dreams. In the fulness of time I would go away and make my fortune, and when it was made I'd come back here and be the god in the car to all these poor debtors that Whittlesea was slowly strangling. If you laugh, I'll throw the tobacco-jar at you."

"I don't see anything to laugh at," was Kingsley's sober rejoinder.

"Then you've lost your sense of humor. Damn it, man; can't you see the merry jest of it? After having been away for nearly seven years, I come back as you see me—a bum, an outcast, a vagabond, not only with the inability to be anything else but totally lacking the desire."

KINGSLEY'S pipe had gone out and he relit it. When the tobacco was glowing again, he said,

"It hurts me to think of what you must have been through, Archer, before you could make such a confession as that."

"As to the preparatory processes, the less said about them the better. We are concerned only with the result. Abel Harriford and his tribe would say that a man in my condition had sinned away his day of grace, but there is a less mystical explanation than that.

"Not having taken the degree of Doctor of Letters, as you say I should have, I shall probably state it awkwardly. But this is the way it presents itself to me: A man is born with certain leadings, tendencies, springs of action—call them what you please—some decent and some vile. They are like the implanting of two antagonistic colonies of blood-cells. So long as there is a fighting handful of the decent red corpuscles left, there is hope for the man. But after the perverted phagocytes have destroyed them all, you have only a beast to deal with. And the beast, as you will admit, is beyond the reach of anything short of a miracle."

"To which I suppose you will add that the age of miracles is past," Kingsley put in. "Let it go. You are at your old trick of theory-spinning now, and you could always beat me at that. I don't choose to believe you are half as much of a derelict as you say you are—as you may think you are. And if you were, I should still try to hang on to you. I have my orders."

"Orders? From whom?"

"No matter about that. I——"

The interruption came from the sidewalk. A young woman who had just come out of the house next door was passing. Griffith let his gaze follow her until she turned into Maple Avenue.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"You ought to know. You lived across the street from her for a good many years."

"Not Margery Stillwell?"

"Of course."

"Why, she—she's a beautiful woman!"

"Well, why not?" said Kingsley, smiling.

Griffith was shaking his head slowly.

"I didn't suppose Bethsaida could fashion anything like she is," he said half musingly.

"Bethsaida hasn't done it all. Margery has had four years in one of the best of the women's colleges in the East."

Griffith was still shaking his head.

"It's a crime to bury anything as beautiful as she is in a dead-alive town like Bethsaida. What does she do?"

"She keeps house for her father. Old Judson still has the farm out beyond Walnut Grove, and he operates it on the long-distance method."

"Um," said Griffith. "Dutiful daughter, eh? Just the same, it's a crime to bury her here. If she has kept the promise of her childhood in other things as well as looks——"

"She has," Kingsley broke in. "There isn't her like in all the world, Archer."

"Ah!" said the derelict. "So that's the way of it; is it? When do you marry her, John?"

"I'd marry her to-morrow if she'd have me."

GRIFFITH'S chuckling laugh was as the crackling of thorns under a pot.

"What's the obstacle?" he asked. "But perhaps I can guess it. You're too damned good."

"Too good?"

"Yes; too virtuous, too conventional, too Bethsaida-esque. Haven't you yet learned that all really good women look a little for the horns and hoofs in the chosen one?"

"Pshaw! That is the rankest tommyrot; and you know it, Arch."

"It is not. It is only your young woman who is a bit on the loose who wants to marry the really and truly virtuous young man."

"Bosh!" snapped Kingsley impatiently. "Let's talk about something else."

"All right; we'll make it something cheerful. I gave the old town the once-over to-day—took a walk down the avenue and shook hands with a few old acquaintances who looked as though they'd rather be shot than to have to recognize me."

"More tommyrot!" Kingsley grunted. "When a man goes round with a chip on his shoulder, he is bound to think that everybody is trying to knock it off." Then, "Did you happen to see our village Shylock when you were down?"

"I did indeed! And, if I'm not greatly mistaken, I saw, through his office window, a staging of the age-old comedy of the spider and the fly. Whittlesea was the spider and you were the fly."

"You've said it," was Kingsley's sober admission. "The old scoundrel had me on the hip, and what he did to me was good and plenty."

"Is it tellable?"

"To you, yes. The business slump has put me in a hole, as it has all manufacturers, big and little. We are still making the Kingsley patent builders' hoist and the Economy farm engines in the Star works, and there is no market. I've kept the shop going because I didn't want to throw a hundred men out of work. That would be little short of a calamity in a town the size of Bethsaida."

"More of your altruistic stuff," Griffith thrust in. "Not one of the hundred would lift a hand to help you if the shoe were on the other foot."

Kingsley disregarded the cynical interruption and went on.

"We had a decent surplus, and I went on building hoists and engines and storing them against a time when the market would open again. Last week I came to the end of that. I'd used up the surplus, and it was a case of borrowing pay-roll money or shutting down for an indefinite period. So to-day I went to Amos Whittlesea and struck him for a six months' loan of fifty thousand, offering the ready-to-ship machines, worth some seventy-five or eighty thousand dollars, as security."

"And he wouldn't let you have the money?"

"Not on the security I was offering. He haggled, as he always does. Said if I couldn't turn the machines into money, the bank couldn't, and all that. Then he made a proposition that fairly took my hide off. I own something over three-fourths of the stock in the Star company. He offered to make the loan if I'd put up my stock as security."

"In other words, he proposed to own you, body and soul. I hope you told him to go to the devil."

"I wanted to; you can bet on that. But the pinch was too real. Some of our men are buying homes, and Whittlesea holds a mortgage over every last one of the buyers. A lot of the others are living from hand to mouth, as so many working men do; they made big wages when times were good and promptly spent them. I've had some pretty bad quarter-hours sweating over the situation. I couldn't make up my mind to shut down and let a hundred men, some of whom have been with us ten, fifteen or twenty years, take the consequences."

"But you didn't let old Amos hold you up for your stock in the company—practically everything you have in the world?"

Kingsley struck a match and relit his pipe, and the brief flare of the pine splinter showed that his remark about sweating over the situation was not altogether a figure of speech.

"I'm trying to convince myself that I have done right, Archer—that in the circumstances there was nothing else to do. Whittlesea has my stock locked up in his bank-vault to cover my note of hand for fifty thousand dollars."

Griffith refilled his pipe and took his time about tamping and lighting it.

"Talk about professional gamblers!" he said at length, with a short laugh. "They are not in it with some of you business men when it comes down to a matter of raw nerve. What is your plant worth?"

"Oh, I don't know. Values are changing so rapidly these days. But I suppose it couldn't be replaced at present prices for much less than two hundred thousand, including the value of the patents."

"Then these machines that are already built and on hand—you say they are worth, in round numbers, seventy-five thousand more?"

"Fully that much."

"Good! Then it simmers down to this: You have placed a bet in a ratio of five to one or thereabouts that business will improve sufficiently within the next six months to let you win out. There isn't a card-sharp in the country that wouldn't fall down dead if you'd offer him such a chilly chance as that."

"Of course it's a risk," Kingsley admitted; "but I think I'm safe. I am figuring just now with a machinery-broker in Chicago on a possible sale of twenty of the hoists for shipment to Australia, cash on the nail. If that goes through within the next thirty days, I'm all right to make the first turn in the road."

Griffith straightened up his chair.

"Thirty days? I thought you said six months."

It was Kingsley's turn to hesitate.

"Six months is the limit of the loan, but Whittlesea insisted upon short-time paper. It is understood that it is to be renewed from time to time."

"*Understood?* With a shark like old Amos! Is the understanding down in black on white—in writing?"

"No; it was verbal."

Griffith twisted himself in his chair and held out a hand.

"Shake," he said, with a chuckling laugh. "As a charter member of the down-and-outs, let me welcome you to our joyous company. In thirty days from this time you'll be one of us."

"If I thought you knew what you are talking about— But you don't. We'll admit that Whittlesea is a grasping old miser, but the thing you are hinting at is too raw, even for him. I'll pull through all right, though it goes without saying that I shall be a good bit easier in my mind when I have that stock back in the safe at the Star works."

"One more question—out of pure curiosity: Have you assigned your stock to Whittlesea and made the transfer on the books?"

"Oh, no; that wasn't necessary. He holds possession, and the face of the note states what the security is. That is all that is needful. If the note shouldn't be paid, the security will be forfeited, and the holder can demand the transfer."

"Then if Whittlesea should lose the note—have it destroyed by fire or some other way—he couldn't hold your stock?"

"Not legally. He would then have nothing to prove his claim to it."

SLOWLY the summer night had descended upon the quiet residence quarter, with the electric lamps winking in to mark the street intersections. Breaking into the evening silence came the mellow blast of a locomotive whistle, and shortly afterward a distance-softened rumbling and clanking of wheels over switch-frogs announced the passing of a through freight train.

Griffith got out of his chair and went to rap the ashes from his pipe on the porch railing.

"That is my invitation, John," he said. "It's time for me to be moving on."

Kingsley had been looking for this from day to day, and he met it as he had planned to meet it when the time should come.

"You are a free agent, Archer, and I can't hold you against your will. But for the sake of the old boyhood days I've been hoping you might be content to stay on with me—for a while, anyway. You are fairly comfortable here in the old house, aren't you?"

"Too comfortable. That is one of the things that revolts my vagrant soul. But that isn't the chief reason why I should be moving on."

"Can you give the other one a name?"

"Yes. Let us call it a 'shadowy recrudescence of a sense of decency'—I guess you might name it that. I have already abused your hospitality like a bum, and if I should stay I'd go on abusing it. I know well enough what Bethsaida is saying about you for having taken me in. It will say worse things if I stay on."

Kingsley laughed, still pursuing his plan.

"I guess I can stand it if you can," he returned. "You said I wasn't to try to reform you, and I haven't tried—have I? You are free—free as the air. If you get tired of loafing and want to work, I can find a place for you in the shops—we're needing an efficiency engineer, anyway. But if you'd rather loaf, do it. What's mine is yours for as long as you care to use it."

"In all of which you are faithfully carrying out your orders, I take it," Griffith cut in cynically. Then, "The next time you see her, you'd better tell her it's no use—not the least in the world."

"Tell whom?" said the ironmaster, in a far too late effort to cover up the slip he had made in admitting that he was acting under orders.

"Margie Stillwell, of course. Didn't you say she was the one who sent you to the jail to dig me out?"

"Well," queried Kingsley doggedly, "what of it? What if she does happen to think you are worth saving? Is there anything out of the way in that?"

"Nothing unusual, at least. That is your good woman's weakness—to want to rescue the perishing. It's a thankless job for the most part—an impossible job after the wicked phagocytes have got in their work. I've a mind to linger on with you a while longer, John, if only to prove to you and to her how absolutely impossible it is. Let's go in and shoot a game of pool. It is too early to go to bed."

THOUGH Griffith had not taken the trouble either to accept or to refuse when Kingsley offered him a place in the Star works, he continued to make it evident that he preferred idleness at his host's expense to labor of any sort at his own. But by the end of another week it was apparent that his time-killing method had undergone a radical change. The old books in the Kingsley library seemed to have lost their charm, and he no longer read them or lounged in the garden, to look on while old Uncle Rastus pottered round with spade and hoe.

Like all towns, large or small, Bethsaida owned its just quota of wayward youth, and for these Tom's Place, impudently staring the Baptist church in the face, and the other and still more abandoned rendezvous on the Willow Springs road were the resorts. Of these two "hell-dives"—to give them the Bethsaidan appellation—it was soon reported that Griffith had become an habitué, and the effect of this intimate contact with seasoned iniquity upon Bethsaidan youth—youth already inoculated with the dissolute and ungoverned spirit of the times—was, in the language of Deacon Abel Harriford, bound to be a judgment upon a community weak enough to permit such a Satan's emissary as Archer Griffith to remain in its midst.

It was upon Kingsley, born and reared in a town small enough to give everybody the right to call him by his Christian name, that the heaviest weight of Bethsaidan accusation fell. Grudgingly admitting that he was not directly responsible for Griffith's appearance in Bethsaida, the Wilgrows and Harrifords and Pettimans insisted that it was specifically Kingsley's fault that the derelict had been encouraged to remain.

"You'd never ought to have took him home with you in the first place," was the oft-repeated Harriford stricture. "I told you you'd rue the day when you done it, and so you will!" And it was, indeed, rather ruefully that Kingsley confessed to Margery Stillwell that he was losing even the slight hold he had upon Griffith at first.

"He still keeps me at arm's length, even more so than at the beginning," Kingsley told Margery in one of their evening talks on the Stillwell porch. "And the gossips are justified in saying that he has tied up with the Gaffney bunch. There are days and nights when I don't see him at all—when he doesn't come home, or, if he does show up, it's at all hours in the night."

"Gambling?" queried the young woman.

"Oh, I suppose so. I gave him a little money at first—fifty dollars or so, at one time and another—and night before last, when I went up to my room, I found a fifty-dollar bill twisted round the stem of the reading-lamp. Of course, he was the one who put it there, and no doubt it came from his winnings. I may have told you that he was more or less of a card-sharp in college; I don't mean crooked—just skilful, and I imagine it's no trouble for him to quit winner in playing with the make-believe young sports he meets in the Gaffney joints."

"You have never brought him here, as I asked you to," was the half-reproachful reminder.

"No. I suggested it one evening."

"What did he say?"

"He said that if I knew some things that he wasn't going to tell me, the last thing I'd do would be to ask him to come here."

The young woman did not comment upon this at once, and when she did, it was to say,

"Isn't that just a little bit hopeful?"

"M-m," said Kingsley doubtfully. "Possibly it might be made to look that way—as an evidence that he hasn't thrown away quite all of the compunctions. But I don't know. It seems now as if he were determined to put himself beyond the pale."

"Bethsaida isn't particularly helping him not to. You don't hear the spiteful talk about him that I do."

"Don't I?" said Kingsley, with a grim smile. "Not a day passes that I don't have to listen to a lot more of it than I care to hear. But we are wasting a mighty fine evening. Let's go somewhere."

KINGSLEY'S modest business-car stood at the curb, and they got in and drove away. An hour later, as they were returning to Bethsaida by the Willow Springs road, a tire went flat just as they were approaching the remodeled farmhouse which had been turned into a roadside tavern. Kingsley steered aside and, pulling up a little way short of a scattering of machines parked in front of the tavern, got out to change the tire. The road-house dining-room opened upon the broad front veranda of the transformed farmhouse, and through the windows Margery Stillwell could see a few of the diners dancing to the music of an invisible orchestra. The second story of the house was also lighted, but above-stairs the window-shades were drawn.

Without being any more prudish than his upbringing in Bethsaida constrained him to be, Kingsley worked rapidly, wishing that the wheel failure had occurred somewhere—anywhere—else, and hoping that he could make the tire change and get away before they should be seen and recognized by some chance passer-by or by any of the Gaffney roisterers.

As it came about, the hope held good so far as recognition was concerned. But while he was tightening the last of the rim-bolts, the road-house door opened and two men came out upon the veranda. One of them seemed to be trying to shake the other one off. Quite clearly above the blaring clamor of the jazz orchestra came the voice of the younger of the pair in hot accusation.

"You robbed me, you damned tramp! You know you did! It was your deal, and you stacked the cards on me!"

What was said in reply was not audible, either to the young woman sitting in the car or to Kingsley struggling with the final bolt. But the crying-mad rejoinder of the younger man was:

"You're Tom Gaffney's steerer—that's what you are! And I'm telling you right here and now that you've played your last crooked game in this joint. You shell out that roll you bilked me out of or I'll kill you!"

Margery Stillwell, from her seat in the car, saw the gleam of blue steel under the veranda-lights and cried out:

"John! John! Stop them!"

Kingsley dropped his tire-wrench and started to run toward the house. But intervention of another sort forestalled him. Before he could reach the gate, Gaffney's daughter darted out of the open door behind the two men and thrust herself between them, pushing them apart and snatching the weapon out of the hand that was brandishing it.

Kingsley turned back, picked up the wrench and climbed to his place behind the steering-wheel.

"There won't be any murder this time," he told his seat-mate soberly, and with that he pressed the starter-button and drove away.

The green roadster had made the three-mile run to town and was slowing into the street paralleling the railroad before the young woman spoke again.

"That was William Harriford who had the pistol, wasn't it?" she asked.

"Yes."

At the turn in Maple Avenue she asked the other question which had been crying out for its answer.

"Was he telling the truth? Had Archer cheated at cards and robbed him?"

Kingsley wagged his head sorrowfully.

"I wish I could say 'No' to that and be sure of it. But I can't, Margery. I can't be sure of anything concerning Archer—not any more."

"It is a great pity—a man wasted," was the low-toned reply. And after Kingsley had helped her out at her home gate and was driving on to his own place at the head of the avenue, the low-voiced summing-up was still ringing in his ears: "A man wasted."

IT WAS only a few days after the incident of the brandished pistol on the veranda of the Willow Tree Inn that a wave of crime began to run through Bethsaida. First, Dickerman's grocery in the working-men's suburb across the railroad tracks was entered and a shelf or so of canned stuff disappeared. Two nights later Jake Steffner's jewelry store and watch-repairing shop was broken into and the haul was rather more valuable. Next came an attempt upon the safe in the Brown Emporium, but here, as it seemed, the robber, or robbers, had taken the alarm before the job could be completed, the only damage done being the smashing of the combination, the knob of which was knocked off as by a blow from a sledge-hammer.

With the town now thoroughly roused and clamoring for protection, Justice Bradford swore in two special constables to serve under Cappy Maitland, and Maple Avenue was made a night beat. Nevertheless, within the next forty-eight hours two houses in the upper avenue were burglarized in the same night, and William Barclay, one of the newly made constables, was found in the morning, lying in the Wilgrow's front yard, beaten to insensibility—attacked from behind, so he testified later, but by whom or how many he could not say.

While Bethsaida was still gasping over this sudden and mysterious outbreak of crime in its normally peaceful midst, Griffith had his first face-to-face meeting with Amos Whittlesea. The occasion was a breakdown of the old man's rattletrap car on the Willow Springs road. Griffith, speeding out to the road-house resort in Roxanna's roadster, saw the rattletrap in the ditch and stopped to offer help. It was not until he had braked his car to a stand and was swinging out of it that mutual recognition followed.

"Huh! It's you, is it?" said the old man sourly. "What you aimin' to do?"

"That depends," was the reply. "What's the matter with your car?"

"I dunno. Steerin' contraption's give out. I couldn't hold the dum thing in the road."

Griffith gave the stranded car's steering-wheel a twist and a shake.

"Stripped your worm-gear," he told the banker. "You'll have to be towed in."

The response to this was an outburst of profanity altogether shocking in so old a man. Out of the eruption of bad language Griffith picked the fact that Whittlesea had been on his way to a farm some ten miles farther out upon a mission that was urgent. If he had been required to do so, it is doubtful if Griffith could have defined the motive which prompted him to offer Whittlesea a lift, but he did it, and the offer was accepted.

For five of the ten miles not a word was said on either side. Now that the lift had been offered and crabbedly accepted, Griffith was deriding himself for the bit of neighborliness. Holding little good will toward Bethsaida in general, he had good reason to harbor nothing but ill will toward the old man sitting beside him. Little by little he had wormed out of Kingsley the story of the failure of the *Telegraph*. It—the final crash—had been brought about by the foreclosure of a mortgage held by Whittlesea, and in the *débâcle* the old miser had taken everything, leaving the former owner and editor a broken man who lived less than a month after the sheriff's sale. Griffith was remembering all this as he hurled the roadster at racing speed over the country road—remembering, and telling himself that if his reckless driving should chance to wind up in a catastrophe, the result would be merely a squaring of accounts—his own and many others.

It was on a hill where the speed had to be reduced that the old man broke the silence which had been stubbornly maintained on both sides.

"What you doin' for a livin' now?" he barked.

"Just what I've been doing any time for the past three years," was the equally brittle retort.

"Huh! Livin' on the int'rest of what you owe, I s'pose."

"You may put it that way if you like."

Silence for a few more of the up-hill wheel-turns, and then,

"They're sayin' in town that if you got your deserts you'd be in the penitenchry."

"It makes no difference to me what they are saying."

The old man's laugh was a harsh cackle.

"That's it—they hate you, and you hate them." Then, out of a clear sky, "Who's doin' all the burglarin' that's goin' on?"

"How should I know?"

The senile cackle came again.

"S'pose you could prove an alibi if they was to arrest you for it?"

"I might try," said Griffith shortly.

"If I was you, I'd look out," said the old man, and after that he said nothing more.

The farm at which Whittlesea had himself set down was one that Griffith remembered—a rather poor piece of hill-land owned by a man named Disbrow, who, even in Griffith's recollections of him, had never quite been able to make ends meet. The old banker did not go up to the weathered farmhouse. Disbrow had just driven in from his wood-lot with a small load of wood, and he stopped and got down to meet Whittlesea at the gate. Griffith, having turned the car and settled himself to wait for Whittlesea, could hardly help overhearing the talk at the farm gate, or, at least, the concluding part of it.

"You've had your warnin', Mark Disbrow, and you know what'll happen to ye if you sell them young heifers out o' your herd," Whittlesea was saying. "The mortgage covers your stock *and* the increase; if you don't believe it you come into town to the bank and I'll show it to ye in black and white."

"It's mighty hard," said the farmer, blank discouragement showing itself in every line of his plain, weather-beaten face. "I was countin' on them yearlin's for the int'rest and our winter's keep. The way things look now, what I could get out o' them'll be all the profits we'll see this year."

"That ain't anything to me," snapped the miser. "I'm just tellin' ye what the courts'll do to ye if you go to sellin' any mortgaged property—that's all." And he turned away and climbed into the car beside Griffith, leaving the dejected debtor standing at the gate.

ON THE drive back to town, Griffith opened the cut-out and stepped on the gas so recklessly that there was no chance for any talk—would not have been even if either of the occupants of the car had cared to talk. Judging by the disaster-chances he took, Griffith's efforts seemed to be directed toward keeping his passenger too busy thinking of his safety to have any time for conversation. Only once, when Griffith took an utterly uncalled-for risk by hurling the car over a railroad crossing less than a hundred yards ahead of an oncoming train, did the old man open his mouth, and then it was merely to let out a shrill yell.

That evening, to mark what was coming to be a rather rare exception, Griffith turned up early at the Kingsley house and took his place at the dinner-table. Later, quite as if he had not broken the older habit, he joined Kingsley in a pipe on the vine-sheltered porch. Out of the table-talk, which had confined itself strictly to an innocuous past, a desultory calling of the roll of the men they had known best in college, Griffith came abruptly to the present.

"You've had me 'under observation,' as the alienists say, for three weeks, John. Have I succeeded in showing you that I'm not worth the powder it would take to blow me up?"

Kingsley's reply was guarded.

"You have been showing me some things that I wouldn't have believed otherwise than by being shown."

"But you do believe them now?"

"You have left me no alternative."

"Be patient a little longer and you will have your reward. You have had part of it already, though you don't realize it."

"I haven't asked for any reward, have I?"

"No; but you've earned one." Then, with a swerve aside, "How is business at the works?"

"Rotten. Just about as bad as it can be. I haven't made a single sale this month."

"You said something about an Australian order that you were expecting to fill."

"Yes; but it fell through."

"And the Whittlesea pay-day draws on apace, with nothing in the treasury?"

"That is all right. Whittlesea will renew my note."

"I am glad you are assured of that. Does Margery know what you have done?"

"Yes; I told her when I did it."

"What does she say about it?"

The young ironmaster moved uneasily in his chair.

"She takes the same view that you do. She is afraid old Amos may take advantage of me."

"Ah!" said Griffith. Then he changed the topic again. "What is the town saying about the burglaries?"

"I think you must know one thing it is saying."

"I do. Amos Whittlesea told me no longer than this afternoon."

"You've seen Whittlesea—talked with him?"

"I had the pleasure of driving him out to the Disbrow farm in Roxanna Gaffney's machine—out and back. His car had broken down. One of the few things he said to me was that all Bethsaida was charging the burglaries up to my account."

"What was he doing out at Disbrow's?"

"The usual Shylock act. It seems that he has lent Disbrow money and taken a chattel mortgage, blanketing everything in sight. His errand was to warn Disbrow not to sell the increase of his flocks and herds, to threaten him with swift legal vengeance if he should."

"But he can't make a thing like that hold in court!" Kingsley protested.

"Oh, yes, he can, if the paper is drawn that way. And it is drawn that way. I heard him offer to show it to Disbrow. You can trust Whittlesea not to overlook any of the jokers in his mortgages. Black writing on white paper is the only thing that counts with him."

Kingsley got up and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"I've got to go back to the office for a while to-night. Don't you want to go along and keep me company?"

"Thanks—I guess not. I have an appointment myself a little later."

"At Gaffney's?"

"Why, yes; at the Willow Tree, if you must know. Two little lads who think they know how to riffle the cards want their revenge. Since I am a gentleman, I can't deny them, can I?"

Kingsley turned at the porch steps and shot a question back at the supine figure in the big hickory rocker.

"Archer, are you robbing these little two-by-four village gamblers?"

"Sure!" said the derelict calmly. "What else would you expect?"

Kingsley went away without making any reply, and for so long a time as the click of his heels could be heard on the cement sidewalk, Griffith kept his place in the big rocker. When the heel-clickings were no longer audible, he tossed the pipe aside. The switch-button of the porch-light was just behind his chair, and he reached around and pressed it. Then he felt in his pocket and drew out an unopened letter. The Bethsaida post-office was the one place he had consistently avoided, but the letter had come to the general delivery and had reached him through Tom Gaffney.

FOR a long minute he studied the scrawled superscription—an address in which even his name was misspelled—shaking his head and muttering to himself:

"It's my notice to quit. If I had had the wit of an idiot I would have found some way of sending her the money without giving her the Bethsaida postmark for a tracer. Never mind. I can stand it for one more week, I guess, and then I'll fade away. And if I ever stay long enough in one place again to let her get track of me, it will be my own fault."

Returning the still unopened letter to his pocket, he turned the porch-light off and went down the walk to the gate. As he was groping for the latch, the door of the Penniman house opened and shut, there was the click of the Penniman gate-latch, and some one—a woman—came swiftly down the sidewalk.

With a sudden premonition of what was coming, Griffith drew back in the shadow of an althea bush. As he did so, the footsteps paused at the Kingsley gate, the gate swung open, and he found himself face to face with Margery Stillwell.

Is there any connection between the burglaries and Archer's resolution to get even with Bethsaida? See the next instalment of "Mellowing Money" in September EVERYBODY'S—out August 15th.

Peter Bell Ivor Presents

Was Barnum Right? New York's Self-Appointed Intellectuals Fall Hard in This Delicious Story. Are They as Easy in Real Life?

By Samuel Merwin

Illustrations by John A. Coughlin

THE two hours between a quarter to nine in the evening and a quarter to eleven mark for Times Square a period of quiet. The immense rush of traffic to the theaters and picture-houses is over. Traffic policemen lounge and chat, and carelessly wave onward the occasional cruising taxi and the anachronistic one-horse victoria. Such pedestrians as appear on the broad walks are sober folk and move sedately. All the entering streets are black with closely parked automobiles. Only the electric signs, indeed, maintain the gaiety that gives Manhattan its traditional, its really institutional flavor as the summit of night life in America; these blaze on in a sky-tangle of brilliantly moving color.

During these slack hours on a certain evening in September, a man paused before one of the crowded little corner drug shops that compete with tobacconists, jewelers, hatters, candy merchants and ticket-brokers for the sidewalk trade.

He was of stocky figure inclining on stoutness, clad neither well nor shabbily, with a hat of soft felt and a tie of silk knotted loosely in a bow. In his manner of wearing his clothes as in features, though smoothly shaven, he appeared vaguely foreign—not German, hardly French, possibly Hungarian or Russian. In manner timid and nervous, even furtive, he glanced now up and down the street, now at the white front of the drug shop, with its narrow show-window packed with rubber goods, safety-razors and all the odds and ends of merchandise and of those useless little contraptions known to the trade as "novelties," for which the pharmacy of our fathers has of recent years become a catchall.

He entered the store, only to hesitate again by the soda-fountain at the discovery that other customers were within. His interest centered unmistakably on the prescription-desk at the rear. A man stood waiting there. After a moment the clerk appeared, wrapped up a bottle and handed the man a price-check.

The foreigner moved back through the store then, with the manner of one who watches his opportunity to speak confidentially, but hesitated yet again as his gaze rested on a tall man who stood opposite the prescription-desk, looking rather absently down at a display of brushes for teeth, bath and hair. This tall man—he must have stood all of six feet and three or four inches—wore, though the evening was warm, a black derby hat and an outmoded cutaway coat with rusty braid bound about the edges. And he had on gold-rimmed spectacles with noticeably heavy, curving lenses.

The foreigner turned impatiently back to the marble fountain and ordered a chocolate ice-cream soda. And as he ate it his eyes constantly studied that rear part of the store. Two young women were there now. It seemed to him that they were talking more than should be necessary.

They were picking up their parcels, were finally heading toward the cashier's desk. And the very tall man had moved along a few steps. The foreigner swallowed at a gulp the last of the thickly sweet sirup, paid his check and went hurriedly back there.

He leaned over, and in a huskily confidential tone said,

"I haf to kill a dog." The clerk raised his eyebrows. "You will gif me some—what you call—some ver' strong, quick poison—ver' strong—ver' quick?"

The clerk pursed his lips.

"What you want is chloroform."

"No—no—no!" The foreigner lifted his hands. His face worked expressively. And only with an effort did he keep his voice down—clearly a volatile sort of person—Latin or Slav. "You do not understand. He is a ver' big dog. If I put in a boot his head he will struggle—so. Perhaps he will bite."

"Is he your dog?"

"Certainly he is my dog. You must believe when I say——"

"He'd hardly bite his master."

"You do not understand. He must die ver' quick, without struggle, without pain. It is a dog that is to me ver' dear."

Slowly, firmly, the clerk moved his head in the negative.

"Nothing doing, my friend. Come in here with the doctor's prescription and I'll let you have it. Or take the dog to a veterinary. I don't care to take the responsibility myself."

The foreigner glanced about, saw that the very tall man had moved nearer, and rushed from the store. The very tall man followed. The clerk shrugged, and turned to the next customer.

FROM drug shop to drug shop the foreigner hurried. Finally he emerged from one, clutching in his hand a small parcel.

At the touch of a hand on his shoulder he whirled and, recognizing the very tall man, backed against the show-window.

"You cannot so put your hand on me!" he cried. "I will not permit that you do so! You haf followed me. It is not right that you should follow me."

The eyes of the tall man gazed down at him with austere dignity through the curving lenses. The face, like the figure, was spare, of a scholarly cast, though with a fulness of outline from nose to chin that suggested a vigor, perhaps even an aggressiveness, not commonly associated with the reflective type of man. The foreigner noted, too, even in his confusion—he had a quick eye for the beautiful and the quaint—that in the stringy necktie was stuck a scarab, evidently authentic, set in old gold.

"You are in trouble," remarked this dominating person now. "You should talk with me. Perhaps I can help you."

"But you cannot say that I am in trouble!" Quickly the nervously expressive hands were up and waving.

The very tall man looked thoughtfully about, noted the beginnings of the crowd that always in New York, at the least occasion, seems to spring from the very pavement, and said:

"Come. We will walk together."

The foreigner, after an irresolute moment, yielded. Columbus Circle was near, and to an all-night restaurant there the very tall man led the way. Removing his hat, he exhibited a huge bald dome of a head. For himself he ordered crackers and a bowl of milk. The foreigner, observing the white-capped cook in the front window, weakly surrendered to the temptation of buckwheat cakes.

The very tall man, after deliberately breaking a cracker and dropping the pieces into the milk, asked in a voice that was impersonal but not unkindly,

"Why did you decide to destroy yourself?" The foreigner's body went limp in his chair. He stared. "It would be so foolish."

"But you cannot say that I——"

"One moment! I have seen you somewhere. You are——"

"I am Gabrowski—Serge Gabrowski." The other knit his brows. "See? You do not know! The name means to you nothing. It means to nobody nothing!" The voice was rising in pitch; the nervous hands were up and waving. In the black eyes flashed the light of a burning ego.

"I have it now." Thus the very tall man, with deliberation. "You are the second cellist of the Symphony Orchestra. I have for years seen you sitting up there just beneath the oboes. The curve of your right wrist is familiar to me, and you habitually, when playing, bend you head to the left. But I did not know the name."

"It is that! To no one is the name known."

"Even so, why destroy yourself?"

Again the flame that was, it would seem, Gabrowski died down. He spoke like a mournful child.

"I will perhaps tell you my story. Either I shall kill myself or I shall speak. But I do not know who you are."

"My name will mean still less to you." He produced a card. The musician read, "Mr. Peter Bell Ivor," and an address in the West Forties.

"You are not, sir, a musician?"

"No." Mr. Ivor surrendered himself for a moment to moody thought. "No. I am a student."

"Ah! A scholar."

"No. Scholarship is a phase in education—a pretentious and somewhat misleading phase. I long ago passed through it. It is enough to say that I observe the human race. You were remarking?"

"I shall tell you. For I must speak. It is plain that you, like myself, are one apart from this." He waved a hand toward the wide front windows through which could be seen the lights of an automobile circling about the obtrusive monument that, unheeded by New Yorkers, dominates the plaza. "You are a student. I am an artist."

"Two lonely men."

"Exactly! It is that! They do not care. They rush by. A cruel city!"

"A stupid city."

"Ah, yes; it is that! Stupid! Bonehead! But we, you and I, see alike. We meet, and we are at once friends. Is it not so? Ah, yes! I can trust you and I shall speak. My father is Gabrowski, of the conservatory of Kief. Then he is at Moscow. At St. Petersburg, Berlin, Rome, Milan, Munich, Vienna, he play the violin. Me, he made cellist. I play the cello ver' well. Not so? But genius I am not. For in the cello is not my heart. It is of singing that as a boy I dream. I am barytone. I leave my father's orchestra and sing at the opera of Kief. I sing also at Warsaw, at Budapest, at Bucharest. I go then to the opera of Belgrade, for it is there that my mother is born. You will know of her—Stepnika? No? Ah, well; it is so. She is of eastern Europe the greatest of *colorature*. At Belgrade she is adored. She is queen. She is now dead. At Belgrade I take her name. I am Stepnik. There they love me. I am like king. Everybody tell me, 'You go to America, and right away you are famous and rich—like Chaliapin and Caruso and Ruffo.'

"Ver' well; I do that. It is now twelve years. I come to New York. And what happens to me? To *me!*" He pressed his hands dramatically to his breast. "I starve. In New York I starve. I bring letters from my father, from Monsieur Grouitch, of Belgrade, and yet I starve! Oh, once, twice, they let me before them sing. And I sing such as they have never hear, for I am great artist. There is no one else to sing like me. But they do not know. The great impressarios, they do not know. I sing before the great *chefs d'orchestre*, but they, too, did not know. They smile, and they say, 'Come in again and maybe there will be something.' To me they say that! It is terrible!"

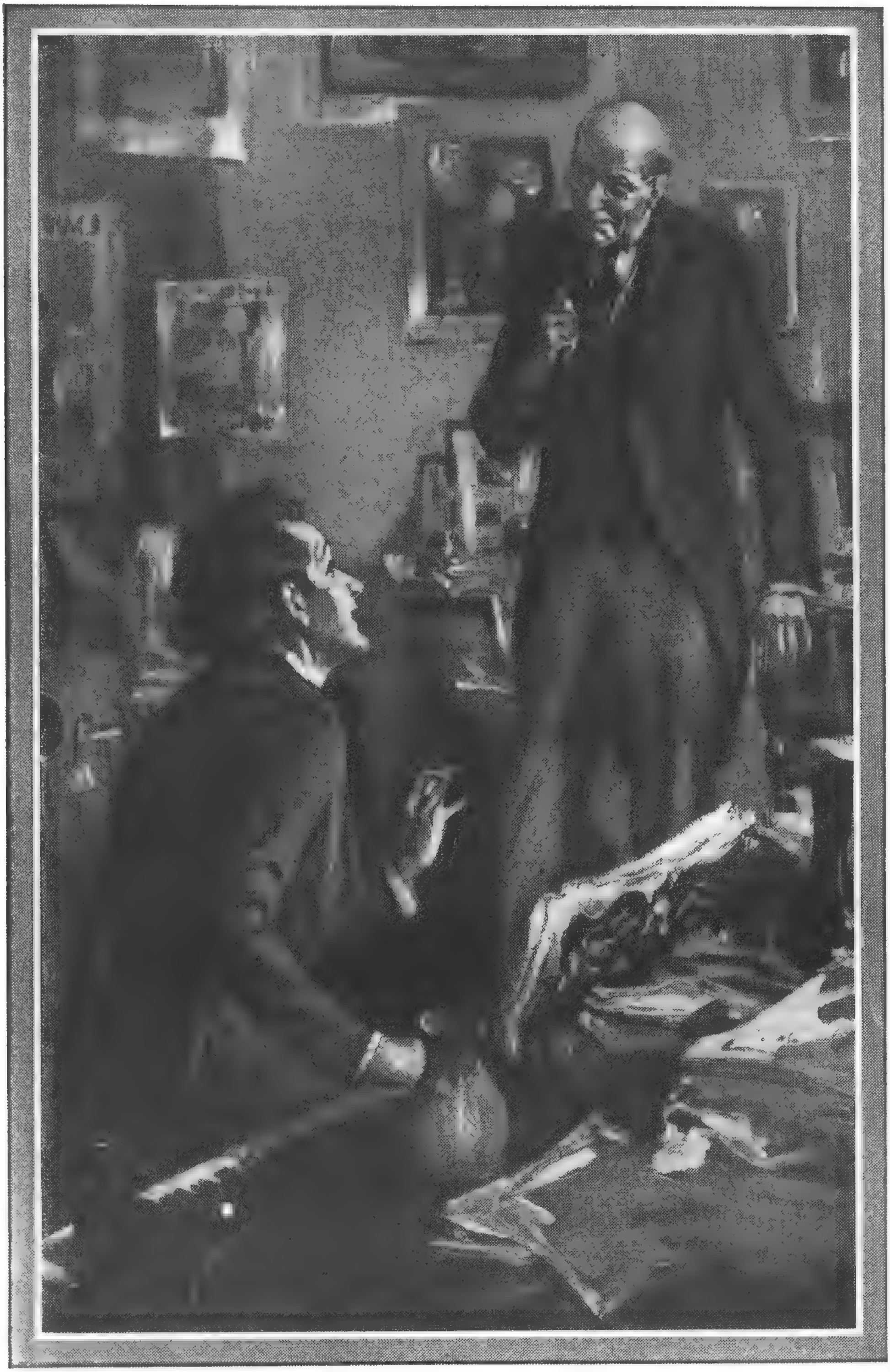
Mr. Ivor considered the man.

"But all this," he remarked, "was long ago. In a measure you have done well. In the Symphony you are a fixture. And I have heard you play with the Pilsudski Trio. Doubtless, too, you have pupils."

"Pupils? Hein! Yes; I haf pupils. But not many. Not enough. I do not teach well. I have—what do you say?—temperament. I am not patient. The teacher is one who haf surrender. I do not surrender. I am great artist. It is not those stupid little pupils—it is me—*me!*" He beat his breast. "Ah! I cannot explain. The artist is not in America understood. They say: 'You can make the living. What else?' Oh, they make me like mad! I ask you—what is a living? You, the great *philosophe*, I ask. I will tell you. It is not that!" He snapped his fingers. "Even so, a living it is not. If I could surrender and in my pupils live—yes. But that I cannot. One boy I find who would be great cellist, and him I teach every day. Every day! He has a talent. He make me like excited. He has not any money. I scold him because he will not work as in Europe we work—with all the heart. We quarrel. He goes away. Poor fish! I ask you, my friend—for I know you are my friend—is that the living?"

HE BOLTED the last of his cakes, pushed back his chair and suddenly, with a startling outbreak of energy, beat his breast again.

"I am thirty-nine years. To-morrow I am forty. It is too old to be failure. I cannot live to be forty—like this—second



Mr. Ivor inclined his head in grave sympathy. The man was right. Unmistakably he was an artist.

cellist." Tears welled into his eyes and escaped to his cheeks. "Last week Strakozcki—he is of the Symphony *chef*—" Mr. Ivor nodded—"he permit that I with the orchestra sing. We are in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh—bah! I lay down my cello. I come from my seat. I sing of Gounod the *récitatif* and air—'She alone charmeth my sadness'—of 'Irène.' Strakozcki he tells me it is well to be at first popular. I am wonderful. I bring to my own eyes the tears. But they are cold. They of Pittsburgh sit like the damn dumb-bell. They do not know that it is the great artist."

"How could they know—" Mr. Ivor began thoughtfully, only to be swept aside by the rush of the narrative.

"And next day the papers they say—the critics—they say—oh, nothing. That I sing for a cellist quite well. That I am not disagreeable. But they criticize that Strakozcki in other years bring famous soloists. And Strakozcki he say to me, 'It is true that you beautifully sing; but what can I do?' "

"It is just as well not to misunderstand the function of the critic. Though until doomsday, of course, the artist will do just that. Certainly you shouldn't have let them see you as both singer and cellist. Don't you see what a position that puts them in? They couldn't possibly admit that you can do both."

"But why not? Look at Campanari! If to that it comes, look at Michelangelo—at Leonardo!"

"Michelangelo and Leonardo would fare anything but well at the hands of the modern critic. No, my dear friend; I'm afraid you have only yourself to blame. You have been guilty, at the very begining, of misunderstanding New York. There is very little civilization here. On a scale of a possible one hundred, I would put New York at about point eleven. It is a city of children, without sober understanding, without standards. They know nothing but capturing money for use in cheap display. To these people"—he waved a hand toward the circle—"merit is nothing. They must be surprised, startled, amused. New York? It is the playground of overfed mongrels—the paradise of bootleggers, of cheap-jack politicians, of sensation vendors. It is a Montmartre in religion, a Liverpool in charm, a Moscow in finance, a Coney Island in philosophy." This philippic was uttered scathingly and with heat. "The worst of it is that until New York has accepted and acclaimed an artist, there is no one in all the rest of the United States to know whether he is great or not. These people! To them the great singer is the woman who has been loved by a prince, or the one who has the smallest feet, or the one who bathes every day in Bordeaux wine. Or an amusing personality. They would like you if you could make funny jokes. It would be easy if you were Irish; it would help much if you were Jewish. Serbia and Poland make it harder, for the war is now forgotten. Though, at that, either is better than being American. If you really are a great artist——"

At this point the foreigner, who had heard little or nothing of the harangue preceding this unexpected allusion to himself, but had been nervously pressing his fingers against the sides of his chair and staring past the great head of his friend at the white wall, was suddenly galvanized into action and speech.

"But how can you to me say that? To Stepnik, of Belgrade? *If* I am great artist! Come; you shall for yourself hear."

HAT in hand, and muttering to himself, the excited foreigner dashed out of the restaurant, with Ivor striding after, and led the way over Fifty-eighth Street to an obscure studio-building. Far up under the roof he threw open a door and switched on a light. Ivor noted a grand piano of a very old model that was heaped high with sheet-music, other heaps of music on a chair and overflowing to the floor, a cello on the floor under the piano and another standing in a corner, other chairs, posters in Russian, Polish, German and what must have been Serbian tacked on the wall, together with a familiar lithograph of Paderewski, and many signed photographs, cheaply framed.

The man fairly leaped at the piano. His fingers ran vigorously and easily over the keys. And then rolled forth an amazing voice.

He sang folk-songs in Polish and Russian—rugged songs of a mournful melodic line but alive with wild beauty. At first, in his excited state, he was plainly eager to exhibit the power of his voice, which Mr. Ivor found almost deafening as it throbbed and rolled about his ears in the confined space. But abruptly then, as if catching himself up, he sang a cradle-song, apparently in Serbian, bringing the voice down without the slightest spreading or softening of that exquisitely balanced tone, keeping it still firmly edged, to the merest thread of delicate floating quality. He drifted on after this into bits from the modern Russian operas, following these with snatches of Debussy and Massenet and Puccini—he laughed harshly at Puccini—and, by way of a surprise, doing, in half-voice, the charming canzonetta from "Don Giovanni."

Ivor, listening, deeply reflecting, did not smile when, at times, grinning savagely with something the appearance of a gargoyle, the singer would whirl about and cry: "What you think of Chaliapin now—hein? What you think of Baklanoff? Ruffo? Poor old Scotti—hein?" He can sing that song. But I sing it better. Is it not so?"

Mr. Ivor inclined his head in grave sympathy. The man was right. Unmistakably he was an artist. And no finer organ had been heard in New York. Of the great barytones from Maurel and the younger Scotti to De Gogorza, no voice had possessed greater flexibility or finer brilliancy of tone. And it was a voice of full operatic range, rich in timbre, firm in intonation, with a bell-like focus, vibrantly alive in the lower registers and in the upper rising surely into the trumpet quality of a robust tenor. He had, unmistakably, the *bel canto*. And evidently he had the repertoire. Indeed, the grounding was all there, the many evidences of a youth and young manhood given over wholly to the atmosphere of musical knowledge and expression.

Mr. Ivor asked for the prologue to "Pagliacci," and then for the toreador song of Escamillo. His host, with a puzzled expression, complied, and Mr. Ivor nodded, with an expression of approval. He did not explain his wish to make a mental comparison with certain well-remembered renditions of these familiar numbers.

And then, once again, the blended temperamental fire of Poland and Serbia that was so gloriously in the man died down, and he sat huddled forward over the keyboard, elbows on the music-rack above it. He looked now like a lost child.

"The trouble with you," observed Mr. Ivor dryly, breathing on his glasses and drying them with his handkerchief, "is that you don't want to succeed."

"But you cannot say that to me!"

"Success? In New York? It is nothing—nothing at all! If you really want it—just that, success——"

"But I haf tell you my story. I go efery-where. I go see efery one. Nobody will help me. In all this great, cruel city——"

"Come with me," said Mr. Ivor.

The singer, staring up at the towering figure, became aware of a quality strangely immense in his threadbare dignity, of a remote but authentic majesty in the man. And then, almost as if hypnotized, he reached for his hat and followed him down to the street.

THEY stood on the island that divides Broadway from Seventh Avenue at the upper end of Times Square. The after-theater traffic was now in full tide, flooding up-town. An amazing river of limousines and taxis filled the two wide roadways and rushed by in a mighty roar on either hand, while from each of the entering streets narrower streams spouted forth to swell the torrent. The sidewalks about the square and above it were packed with slow-moving, jostling human creatures.

"But you cannot say that I—" The singer was shouting again and gesticulating. "Anything that could be done it would take so much money! Even in New York to gif a concert I must pay to the manager fife hundred, a thousand dollar! I must pay for advertise in the papers or they will not at all hear me. They will not of me speak. On the fence and the ash-can I must pay for *des affiches*. I must pay for this, for that, and the money I haf not. Oh, so much money! And if all this I do, who, then, will come to hear the man who haf been for twelve year second cellist?"

"You are stating the superficial problem accurately enough," observed Mr. Ivor absently, adding, then, "Tell me; were you in the war?"

The singer pressed his hands to his head. In one his hat was crushed.

"Oh, it was terrible! You must let me forget. The shell-shock he come again to me. I suffer so in Serbia in the awful retreat!"

"Mm," mused Mr. Ivor. "So simple." He gazed about at that portion of the crowd that swarmed continuously over the island. "Look at them!" he cried a moment later, so abruptly that the singer started. "There they go! New York! Look at the faces—this one—that one over there! What are they thinking?"

"How can I tell this?"

"But, my dear friend, you cannot succeed until in some way you capture the imagination of New York. You have got to make them think about you. And how on earth are you to do that without even a rudimentary understanding of the natural drift of their thoughts? Look at the faces! Can't you see that those men are thinking of women—rather unpleasantly, at that—and of liquor? Oh, and of money, of course—money to spend. And those young women—they are thinking of money and, second, of men. Many of them also think of liquor. All are thinking of money, though, or of its equivalent in diamonds, platinum and pearls. And gowns! There isn't an adult here. All are children. Granting this much, and it is elementary, how would you move to capture their minds? Have you a new toy that will please them? Can you make them laugh?"

"Ah, no! I cannot do this."

"But can you imagine them stirred by real artistry? By success—yes; they worship success. But by art?"

"Indeed I cannot!" He was beating his breast. "That is why I buy the small bottle. Here is no place for the artist!"

"Mm."

The singer, glancing up now, found a degree of reassurance in the bright eyes behind the curving lenses—eyes that contrasted queerly with the grimly set mouth. Here was, perhaps, a fanatical brain. Some strong thought was forming there. That much he sensed. The eyes made him timid.

"I will help you," said Peter Bell Ivor.

"Ah, my friend—for I know you are now my——"

"On one condition." He couldn't escape those eyes. "That you do precisely as I say."

"But I must understand what you do to me. I cannot take the bath of *vin de Bordeaux.*"

"I cannot help you unless I have your word. Success for you? It is nothing. A matter of the merest common sense. Before Christmas New York will ring with your name. But I must have your word."

The singer hesitated, mumbled, then bowed his head.

"You will do as I say?"

"Yes. It is that."

"Very well. Send me to-morrow a program. There will be numbers for the cello and groups of songs. It is important that one of these groups be of Serbian songs. Send it to-morrow. You have my address. After that, wait. You will hear from me."

"Ah!" The singer clutched at his hand and would have kissed it, but Mr. Ivor withdrew it and stalked severely away through the crowd.

TWO weeks later, at ten-thirty in the morning, a youngish woman leading a child paused before a number in the West Forties and consulted a card in her free hand. The house was one of a red-brick row, with a dilapidated high stoop and once-green blinds from which slats were missing.

The woman rang the bell and was curtly directed to the top floor, rear room. She toiled up the three flights and timidly knocked. An austerely deep voice responded with a "Come in!" She caught her breath, drew the child close and stood motionless. Again the deep voice boomed its "Come in!" And then, mustering all her courage, she pushed open the door.

All she could see at first was books—books in many languages on plain pine shelves that reached to the ceiling—and then a window that gave a prospect of many other back windows and of rusty fire-escapes that were crowded with milk-bottles, tins, jars, boxes and bedding and of a network of clothes-lines through which a gaunt old Chinese ailanthus had somehow contrived to grow up into full freedom. And then, as her capacity for observation made some headway through her confusion, she saw, as well, an old pine bed, a bureau with a cracked mirror, a corner-cupboard in which, between curtains of burlap, a few dishes were in evidence, and a shabby card-table which seemed to be on the point of collapsing under the weight of the books and manuscripts that were heaped on it, and, finally, a man with an immense bald dome who was slowly rising from the chair behind the table—rising and rising to an astonishing height.

"Yes?" said the voice now in a tone of gentler dignity, as his eyes considered the frightened little foreign woman and the swarthy, wide-eyed child.

"Meester Eevor, is it?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes. Mr. Ivor. What can I do for you."

"I am afraid. My husband——"

"You are Mrs. Gabrowski?"

"Yes; I am this. But my husband——"

"I have written him to be here at eleven o'clock."

"Yes. It is this: When he see your letter he get all excite. He run around and talk terrible. He say you make him take the bath in the *vin de Bordeaux,* and he will not do this. He will first kill himself. And I am afraid. And then he run out of the house and I cannot say where he go." Like her husband, this rather pretty woman—a Gipsylike person, possibly Rumanian, Mr. Ivor thought—could become unexpectedly voluble. "He see in the paper that Gabrowski he play next week in Carnegie Hall, and then same time Stepnik he sing, and he cry out ver' loud, 'How you do this?' And he say he will not make monkey on the ashcan and the fence and it cannot be so. And I am so afraid when he get like this. It is as you do not know. He stand in front of the looking-glass and to himself say terrible things and I think he go crazy. And then he go rush away and I cannot find him, and I am afraid he die."

"He will be here at eleven," observed Mr. Ivor reassuringly. "I have his promise. He will not break it." And pressing a cane-seated chair on his caller—one of the two chairs in the room—this strangely tall man took from one of the shelves a priceless work on medieval costume and opened it for the silent child—even squatted awkwardly on the floor beside the little one in order to show him certain of the richly colored plates.

At a rapid thumping sound somewhere beneath them he remarked, "I think that will be your husband," and rose again to his full height.

HER husband it was, running headlong up the three flights and then stopping in bewilderment on the threshold.

"Come right in," said Mr. Ivor. "Your wife has been worried about you, but I assured her you would be here on time. You see, I have your word."

"My word—yes—it is that! But, I ask, what is it that you do to me? If I am Stepnik, I cannot be Gabrowski! If I am Gabrowski, I cannot be Stepnik! And in Carnegie Hall!"

"Take this chair," said Mr. Ivor firmly, fixing his gaze on the sputtering European. Adding, when he had been obeyed, "You promised you would do as I say."

"But I am great artist! I cannot take the bath of——"

"You will be spared the bath," broke in Mr. Ivor dryly. "Only a woman could do that sort of thing. But you are dealing with a primitive people. New York is no place for the squeamish little mind. It is necessary here to act with vigor."

"But to haf Carnegie Hall of an evening when I do not know. I did not say to do this!"

"No. I said it. I have done it. It is now too late to object. You have placed yourself in my hands. I take all the risk. You are simply to do as you are told."

Gabrowski would have sputtered on in his bewilderment had not his wife at this point interrupted with an excited plea in her own tongue. Of self-consciousness she had none. She cried aloud, smote her breast as he had done, and finally clung to him, sobbing, pleading and kissing all at once.

Mr. Ivor, in some embarrassment, turned to find his hat, and then ushered them down to the street.

In silence, the four abreast, they walked over to a building near Broadway, ascended in an elevator and entered the rooms of a wig-maker. Gabrowski, timid now, glancing up from moment to moment at this aloof being who had usurped the command of his destiny, would have hung back; but one firm glance drew him on.

The wig-maker, with the simple question: "Iss diss de gentlemans?" went swiftly to work on him, first smearing the lower part of his face with an odoriferous spirit-gum, and then attaching bits of black hair which he combed out of a braid. Thus, bit by bit, he built up a full beard, which he trimmed, spade-fashion, with scissors.

Gabrowski's eyes, never leaving the face of his new mentor, were those of a dog. He was plainly beyond words, staring in this dazed manner because the situation had actually outrun the farthest reaches of his imagination. He bowed, like a child, to audacity. His wife, it could be seen and felt, stood with the very tall man. Some deeply histrionic strain in her nature appeared to be uppermost as her sparkling eyes followed every deft motion of the wig-maker. When he stuck on tufted eyebrows, she gave way to a giggle of pleasure. Intuition told her that all things were working together for good. And on the spot she decided that the beard he had worn when she first met him should be grown anew.

"Come, now!" said Mr. Ivor, when the task was completed, glancing at his watch.

"But I cannot—like this—go on the street!" Gabrowski's voice was weak.

"Come!" repeated Mr. Ivor. And out to the street they went.

Gabrowski, overpowered by something near a sense of guilt, kept closely beside the striding tall man. Once, when they passed close to a sauntering policeman, he clutched the sleeve of the cutaway coat. The wife and child, meanwhile, were hurrying after them.

DOWN as far as Forty-fourth Street Mr. Ivor sternly led the way, where he turned east, finally coming to a halt under the street-canopy of a hotel.

To Gabrowski he simply remarked, "Wait here a moment," and turned back toward the pursuing wife.

"Here," he explained to her, "is the key to my house. My room is unlocked. At exactly a quarter past one I wish you to be here—exactly here—in a taxi-cab. When your husband comes out of the hotel, take him back to my rooms. Here is money enough. Remember—a quarter past one—be waiting here in a taxi-cab."

He turned calmly back then and led the speechless Gabrowski—firmly, by the elbow—into the dimly lighted, pleasant lounge of the hotel, which for twenty years folk of the theatre and of the world of letters have made almost their own. Exquisitely gowned young actresses moved about or waited on the softly upholstered sofas and chairs for luncheon-guests or -hosts. Two directors of motion pictures lounged at the news-stand. An Irish and a Hindu poet sat, unacquainted, in the same corner. Editors of popular magazines, critics for the daily press, aggressive young publishers of books, playwrights, play-producers, press-agents came in across the lounge to check their hats and turn either into the narrow dining-rooms at the left or back to the spacious and more quiet apartment at the rear. It was into the latter that Mr. Ivor guided Gabrowski.

At the door, for a moment, the musician hung back, pressing nervous fingers against the beard.

"It will come off," he whispered. "This is a terrible thing!"

"The wig-maker guaranteed that it wouldn't," replied Mr. Ivor very quietly, and pushed him within.

"I sometimes drop in here for lunch to observe the current phase," he remarked next, as they found seats against the wall, where, side by side, they faced the room, which was now rapidly filling up. "I find it amusing. It is the center of professional or professed cleverness in New York, and is, therefore, typical. For cleverness, while of small value in itself, represents New York at its rather poor best— Really, it will be better if you keep your hands off your beard."

"But I am afraid! If it come off, what can I say?"

"The wig-maker assures me that it will not come off. I should hardly have taken you for a coward."

"How dare you say——"

"Very good! I am glad to learn that you are not a coward. And now, really, it will be vastly better for us to discuss other matters. Here—I will tell you who these people are. Some of the names should be familiar to you. Waiter—if you please!"

"But I cannot eat with this——"

"Quiet! I can do nothing for you if you keep on that topic. Certainly you can eat." He gave the order, and then continued, with remarkable *savoir-faire,* his little lecture on those present. "I have, indeed, made a point of familiarizing myself with the names as well as the faces of those who frequent this not uninteresting center. You will note many young women of considerable beauty."

Gabrowski, indeed, despite his abject discomfort of spirit, had become aware of the environing pulchritude, and already the false beard was tipping a very small way upward.

"They are, for the most part, what are

known in the jargon of Broadway, as 'ingénues.' See—they move about from table to table, visiting. It gives the place an almost homelike touch. The dark, thin man with the tired face sends out a daily letter to several hundred newspapers in the smaller cities. The smiling youth in spectacles directly behind him is the play-critic for a Cleveland daily. The blond young woman sitting yonder with her mother is Ina Claire, the actress. You will have heard of her, doubtless. The two young men by the pillar—no; over here to the left—are performing critics. They write to entertain in a magazine of their own, and do it rather well. A performing critic is, after all, the only kind. For those who lean on absolutes of art or of tradition lean on the slenderest of reeds. Their names are Nathan and Mencken. The stout man in spectacles talking with them is Joseph Hergesheimer. The huge person beyond—with a monocle and a face by Franz Hals—is Hendrik Willem Van Loon."

OBVIOUSLY Gabrowski heard only snatches of this. His fingers fidgeted about the gummed-on beard, and his eyes roved wildly. But Mr. Ivor, whatever his reasons, pressed on, with an air of geniality not before apparent in his make-up.

"Observe the four girls at the table here—right here"—this in a lowered voice. "They are Margalo and Ruth Gillmore, Mary Brandon and Roberta Arnold. Just beyond them are Tallulah Bankhead and Zoë Akins, the playwright. The two at our left, second table, are rising young actresses. The one with the delicate features and the wispy hair is Peggy Wood; the other, who seems ablaze with vitality, is Helen MacKellar. You will be impressed by the atmosphere of youth about the place. You will not see Mrs. Fiske or Julia Marlowe or Otis Skinner. But many of the famous Broadway names of to-morrow will derive from the free-and-easy intercourse here. For that matter, nearly every one in the room is in some measure known and marked on Broadway. For instance, if you will lean slightly this way, you will see a large round table in the rear. That is, of the cult of cleverness, the holy of holies. There sit the phrase-makers. Every day a select few meet there for luncheon and conversation. And all have a place in New York. The blond man with the hooked nose is Alexander Woollcott of the *Times*. He and George Nathan make it a point to eat at separate tables, though each, in his field, has ability. The young woman of the quiet charm next him is Neysa McMein, who paints magazine-covers. Robert Benchley sits at her right—another performing critic. Still another performing critic, Robert Sherwood, is the tall, thin young man in the gray suit. Heywood Broun, farther this way—the large, silent man with the shock of black hair—is perhaps the best performer of them all, if we except Mencken, for he rises frequently above the mere satirical cleverness, in which all are proficient, to the serener planes of irony. He has vision, and is not New-York-bound. In his own domestic circle he is known as the 'Clinging Oak.' The severe, pale young man with knit brows is Brock Pemberton, a producer of plays. The young man next him, David Wallace, is this year venturing into the same field. Truly, it will be interesting to see if Americans can produce plays in New York and live. The two young men with their backs to us are Messrs. Connelly and Kaufman, playwrights. The bald one is Marc Connelly. He is one of the brightest of these clever ones, with a gift at clowning and a deft pen. Watch him. He will soon be up and moving about the room, saying bright things in the current vernacular."

The waiter was setting out the food. Gabrowski considered it, with a soft groan.

"I cannot eat!" he moaned in Mr. Ivor's ear. "Already they come off. See!"

Excitedly he turned his face, but Mr. Ivor only smiled.

"Not at all. The spirit-gum, doubtless, has an uncomfortable effect on the skin, but the beard is perfectly secure. You will please eat a little. After that I will explain to you why we are here."

"But why do you not now tell me? You bring me here. You make me monkey. You show me all this smart people. I do not know why."

Mr. Ivor considered this outburst, and then, in a manner of quiet thoughtfulness, consulted his watch.

"I wouldn't mind eating a bit of this lunch myself," he remarked, "though they are all here now. The room is full. There will be no better time. Yes; we had better be about it. You will remember singing, that evening at your studio, a Serbian army-song with a rousing climax."

"Ah, yes!" murmured the musician. "It is this." And he hummed the opening phrase, then, confused again, pressed his beard into place.

"Yes. That one. Mm. Very good. Now I want you to sing it."

"But it is not that I——"

"Sing it—now! Full voice!"

"But they would——"

The brightly hypnotic eyes of Peter Bell Ivor met his squarely. He whitened, quailed perceptibly, even shrinking somewhat against the wall. Next he opened his mouth and expanded his chest as if to burst actually into song, but quailed again, pitiably, as if full realization of his strange predicament had cleared only at this moment in his brain, bringing with it a sense of horror. The great difficulty lay in avoiding the eyes of this unquestionably mad man. It seemed to him that if he could escape the spell of those eyes it might become possible to slip down to a wash-room, remove the shameful false beard and make his unobtrusive way out of the building. To be sure, he had given his word. He was being dragged helplessly along.

He heard his own voice. He was singing! He saw all the startled faces through a haze. The head waiter stood in the entrance like one paralyzed. A charming little ingénue was gazing raptly at him out of the hush of the room. That one face he saw. He was stirring the child, as he had stirred other women in Belgrade and Milan and Bucharest. After all, why not? He let them have it now, brought up a full, free breath-column, and threw it firmly into the nasal cavity, played, as he so well could, with the swinging rhythm. The one girl breathed aloud, through the silence that followed,

"How perfectly wonderful!"

Then there was applause. People were pressing in from the lounge. Perhaps he would sing again. But that head waiter was rushing at him, an embodied protest. Mr. Ivor calmly ate his chicken pie. How could he?

The ingénue plucked an orchid from her corsage and tossed it to him. He rose, grinned in delight; but now he clapped his hand to his face, with an angry exclamation, and rushed from the room with such violence as nearly to overturn the table. Mr. Ivor followed, with dignity but with almost as great rapidity, catching up with him in the more crowded passage by the clerk's desk. As they passed out through the revolving door, Mr. Ivor saw that he was trying to tear off the beard, and succeeded in holding one arm until he could rush him across the sidewalk, propel him into the waiting taxi-cab and slam the door. The beard, by that time, however, was nearly all in Gabrowski's two hands, sticking between his fingers.

Back in the dining-room, an orchid lay forgotten on the floor.

IMPERTURBABLY Mr. Ivor returned to his table. Of the hundreds of eyes upon him he seemed unaware. Seating himself and drawing his napkin across his knees, he resumed the chicken pie.

The young playwright named Connelly came over to him, laughing.

"What is it?" he asked. "We all want to know what it is."

"I am not sure that I understand you," said Mr. Ivor gravely.

"Who is this bird?"

"Bird?"

"Oh, come! The singer—who is he?"

"He is Stepnik, formerly of the Royal Opera at Belgrade."

"But why haven't we heard of him before? My God, he's marvelous! See here, Mr.—I don't know your name——"

"Ivor."

"Mr. Ivor—mine's Connelly—won't you come over to the round table? Bring your plate right along. Here, George"—this to the head waiter—"move Mr. Ivor's things over to the table."

With that majestic slow stride Mr. Ivor followed him, bowed gravely as he was introduced and took a chair.

"The bird is Stepnik," explained Connelly, "of Belgrade—a Serbian."

"Oh, yes," remarked a young man named Taylor; "he appears with Gabrowski next week at Carnegie. Gabrowski's a second-rater."

"A subtle Serbian," said Woollcott somewhat acidly. "Press-stuff." Then, to the guest, "Are you his manager?"

"No."

"You're interested in promoting concerts."

"Not at all."

"There's mystery here," murmured Roland Young.

"He's a friend of yours?" asked Connelly.

"No. I have seen him only once before. That was two weeks ago."

"But you brought him in here?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I could think of no other way to get him a hearing."

MR. IVOR deliberately laid down his knife and fork and considered the circle of young faces. Here sat, whatever their actual years, youngest New York—the New York of the moment. Few ties with the past touched their memories. Tradition played no mellowing part in their lives. They lived in a good-humored-enough understanding that this rather heartbreaking old world had been newly created for their observation and amusement. They were above it and critical of it. They were guinea-stamped New Yorkers, and therefore superior to all else. But they were clever. They had access to the columns of the press and therefore wielded a power. Much of current opinion regarding life as entertainment—and, they might ask, in what other way could life reasonably be regarded?—was molded and hardened by the talk of this table. They made reputations as well as phrases. And now—or never—he must win them.

"Oh, you put him up to this singing-stunt?"

Mr. Ivor inclined his head.

"Certainly. I brought him here to-day for the purpose."

"And you have no interest in the profits of his concert?"

"If any?" This from Roland Young.

"None whatever. If any, they go to the orphaned children of Serbia. I have succeeded in intersting the Jugo-Slavian consul to that extent. He remembers Stepnik with enthusiasm."

"What'd he run away like that for?" asked Connelly.

"He is overcome. I think he has fled to my room. I must look him up. He is in a very excited state."

"Considering the situation from the view-point of psychoanalysis—" put in John Toohey.

"Well, lookit"—Connelly—"you mustn't mind our questions. You've got us going. Just where *does* your interest come in?"

"It appealed to me as an experiment. Here is a fine artist—you will grant that."

"Yes. Surely."

"A man of background and experience who tries to get a hearing in New York fails, and is reduced to playing obscurely in orchestras for twelve years. He finds himself on the eve of his fortieth birthday a failure, and is on the very point of self-destruction. Realizing that he could never make his way in New York on merit or through any legitimate means, it has interested me to see if the thing couldn't be done through illegitimate means—such as this bizarre performance here to-day."

"This is all nonsense, of course," observed Woollcott. "He couldn't have tried. In no great city is merit so promptly recognized as in New York."

"You're wrong, Aleck," said Wallace. "It seems to me I've heard something about Galli-Curci singing round in restaurants here. But nobody ever discovered her until she got going in Chicago."

"My point is," insisted Mr. Ivor, with grave courtesy, "that New York has no appreciation of art as such. It must be entertained—surprised or amused. Where, for example, would John McCormack stand to-day without his genial personality and 'Mother Machree'?"

"Looking at it from the view-point of psychoanalysis, of course—" began Toohey.

"Lookit!" cried Connelly. "What this bird needs is a press-agent."

"What's the matter with his present one?" remarked Young, *sotto voce*.

"It sounds like a deserving case——"

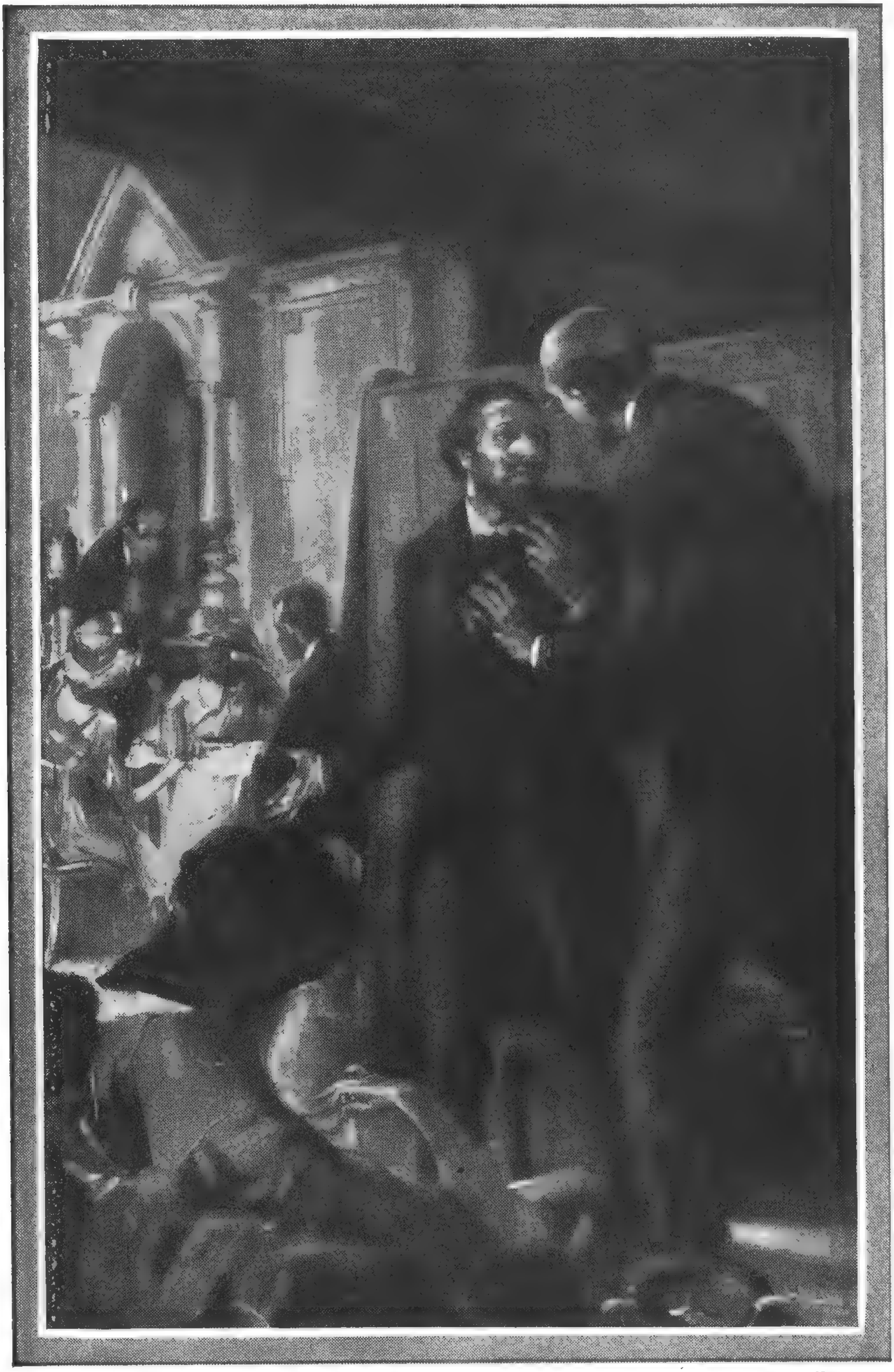
"It is," said Mr. Ivor.

"And we know he can do the job. Let's pitch in and have some fun with this thing. Put him over."

There was a murmur of approval about the table. Here, indeed, was a new toy.

Mr. Ivor gravely rose.

"I thank you for your interest," he said. "It is certain that unless some positive action is taken there will be no public interest in the concert, none of the important critics will appear; it will eventuate in a cut-and-dried failure. New York really should do better for Stepnik than that. Here is my card. Call on me if I can be of further



At the door the musician hung back, pressing nervous fingers against the beard. "It will come off," he whispered. "This is a terrible thing!"

service." And with every eye upon him he walked out of the room.

He found Stepnik-Gabrowski pacing the floor and muttering feverishly, scrubbing the while at chin and eyebrows with a towel. The wife sat huddled in a staring sort of fright. The child was happily tearing pages from the work on medieval costume.

"Excellent! Excellent!" cried Ivor, smiling down on them. "Everything is in splendid shape."

"How can you so talk?" wailed the musician. "What you have done to me? It is shame of me!"

"Not at all, my friend. We have created a fine ripple of excitement. You will see to-morrow. Wide-spread publicity is assured."

"But the terrible whisker! All will know that I am false!"

Mr. Ivor was serene.

"Not at all. No one really saw the whiskers go but the door-man and a few passers-by. None of those in the hotel suspects. I made certain of that." He laid a firm hand on one of Gabrowski's trembling shoulders. "No; you need only go home and practise for your concert. And I would advise plenty of rest and sleep. And be at the hall by eight o'clock sharp. There will be no need for me to see you before that time. Already I have given this matter much of my time."

The wife had his other arm now, and was crying:

"Everything is all right, as the good gentleman say! We must go now."

But the musician tore himself away from them and beat his breast.

"Stop!" he cried. "I must first know what you do to me. Gabrowski is not Stepnik; Stepnik is not Gabrowski! Yet to me, to the great public, the paper say both are at Carnegie Hall. I cannot go on when you make of me——"

The voice died out. Mr. Ivor, drawn up to his full height at the rickety, overburdened table, was gazing down at him with a strong flash of anger in his eyes.

"You will go on!" boomed the deep voice.

"But I cannot be made——"

"Have you considered how much money has already been spent on your concert, Gabrowski?" An expression of bewilderment came over the mobile Slavic face. "Listen! I am a poor man. My life is dedicated to thought—to the most difficult task in the world—thought. Here"—he laid a lean hand on a thick pile of manuscript, written, every neatly formed word of it, with a pen—"here is my life-work, my treatise on civilization. I have set myself the burden of proving that virtually none exists. For years I have ventured on experiments, keeping, in every instance, exhaustive notes. To me this is but one such experiment. It happens, however, to be an exceedingly expensive one. By an odd chance, an old policy of endowment life insurance matured a few weeks ago, which, when the loans against it were balanced, netted me nearly fifteen hundred dollars. It is this money which I am using for your concert. If you fail me, my loss will be complete."

The musician stood gazing miserably up at this incomprehensible man. His face worked. Tears came.

"It is not that I would have you of me think—" he struggled chokingly to say.

"Take him home, please," said Mr. Ivor to the wife.

She led him, docile now, away.

GABROWSKI, his wife and the child hovered about the corner of Seventh Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street. An audience was assembling; there could be no doubt of it. They dismounted from the street-cars and 'buses, or arrived from the East Side on foot. The Serbian language could actually be heard from this and that swarthy group, as could German, Polish, Italian and Hungarian, even Greek. And automobiles waited in a line at the portico.

"Quick!" whispered the wife. "They must not see you. We will go to the stage."

She offered no reason why he must not be seen. And his eyes avoided hers. There was a surmise in her mind that coincided with a fear in his, touching on a topic that neither, voluble though both were, had mentioned during a racking week.

Back they went. Many hundreds of times he had entered through those side doors on Seventh Avenue, and always, as now, with his cello under his arm. But on this occasion he was to have the soloists' room for himself. It was wonderful, perturbing, terrible. Still avoiding the eyes of the wife, his lips painfully compressed, he led the way within, hurrying back of the stage and up-stairs to the spacious apartment where John McCormack and Paderewski and Hofmann and Sembrich and a hundred other master performers had prepared themselves to give pleasure to thousands of auditors in the great hall. Often, during this or that orchestral performance, he had looked from the stage upward into those lofty, crowded balconies. To-night he would look again up there.

Mr. Ivor awaited them. His presence had a somewhat reassuring effect—though Gabrowski's knees were shaking. No one else was in the room; the two accompanists, it appeared, were to wait below. A black hand-bag on the table caught his nervous eye. He wondered what it could be there for. And a battered suitcase lay on a sofa.

Mechanically he tuned his cello. Then it was time to appear. He found himself carrying the familiar instrument out on the vast stage, but alone now. There was applause. It warmed him. He knew, suddenly, that it had been his deepest want. Without applause, without expression and the thrill of emotional responsiveness in others, why live? What could be the use? And they liked him. Hundreds and hundreds of them were out there. The great hall was not full, but he could see—oh, so many!

In a box near the stage, leaning toward him, was a face. Somewhere he had seen that face. Ah! The little lady of the hotel who had tossed him an orchid. But why did she not smile? Ah, the terrible whisker! She did not know him. It was to the whisker she had thrown the flower! His heart sank.

But they did like him. Up there, away up top, the Poles they applauded Gabrowski!

He ascended the stairs. Another man was in the room, a little chunky man, opening the satchel that stood on the table. Somewhere he had seen that face. The face spoke.

"Ah, here iss de gentlemans!"

He found himself staggering back against the closed door.

"Come, please," said Mr. Ivor. "We have no time to lose."

The chunky man was taking a rope of hair from the satchel. And that sticky little bottle!

Gabrowski drew himself up. The cello, he placed on a chair. He felt in his pocket for a certain smaller bottle. His hour—his moment—had come. Quickly—for the indomitable Mr. Ivor was moving toward him—he poured out a few of the pills and swallowed them. There was time then only to throw out his hands toward his wife and cry brokenly, "I cannot!" As he spoke he was thinking of that face in the stage box and of an orchid forgotten on a hotel floor. Perhaps he shouldn't have eaten the pills. For in that awful whisker she would again know him, perhaps again throw the orchid.

Mr. Ivor had him by the shoulders, shaking the words and even his breath away from him, was dragging him to the sofa.

From the suitcase came an unpleasant instrument that was clapped by a sure hand to his mouth. This terrible, wonderful man! The gentleman's fellow was holding him down. Mr. Ivor pumped him out. Pumped him! The man had foreseen even this! He wished his wife wouldn't scream so. He felt ill. Mr. Ivor made him drink milk. Then a small drink that warmed his middle.

He began to feel better—a little.

"Go right ahead with the make-up," said Mr. Ivor coldly, firmly, to the wigmaker. "We really haven't a moment." And the fellow deftly applied once more the terrible whisker. Each time, it seemed, he was to apply it, once for every group of songs.

"I cannot do this!" Gabrowski moaned. "I cannot go there again! I cannot sing!"

But he did. Stepnik did.

"COME in!" called Peter Bell Ivor, sighing as his eyes lingered over a half-written sentence.

The door opened. Gabrowski stood there. Behind him could be seen the wife and the child. He wore a very new ready-made suit, with a gay red handkerchief peeping from the breast-pocket and on his lapel a carnation. He carried a cane of bamboo.

"You are feeling better?" asked Mr. Ivor, courteously rising.

"Oh, yes! I am fine." He sauntered into the room. The child followed, crying out for his book. The mother pursued the child. "I go to Cleveland next week. Not so much money. Only five hundred. But"—he shrugged—"they want me at Chicago—St. Louis—Milwaukee—Cincinnati—Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh—hein? What you think?"

"I should go by all means."

"Gatti-Casazza he chase me all over. He say I must for him sing. Oh, yes; me I sing all right! But he must wait—hein?" He twirled the cane. But then, as the atmosphere of the austere room touched him and swiftly enveloped his spirit, the new assurance begun to fade. His brows drew together and his forehead gathered into wrinkles. "But I ask myself what to do about the whisker. If I am like this, if I am just Gabrowski, they say, 'But where is Stepnik?' I ask myself what I do about that. So many people of music here they know Gabrowski. For twelve years I am in the Symphony. I am hide now. They write to me. See!" From a stuffed-out pocket he drew a handful of typewritten communications. "I succeed—yes. Everybody crazy about me now. But I cannot let them see me. I go to the drug store and call them up. But I ask myself what I do."

"Really, if it is a question of the whiskers, you know where to go. Further than that I can't advise you. If you travel away from New York there should be time to raise a set of your own. Then Gabrowski will become Stepnik for as long as you like."

"Ah, it is that! It is that! I raise a set—is it not? I raise a set for Pittsburgh. I show Pittsburgh—I raise hell for Pittsburgh!" Once again, after this jubilant moment, his face fell. "But they will not know," he added unhappily.

"No," said Peter Bell Ivor, with a faraway look in the eyes behind the curving lenses; "they will never know."

A Complete Novel in September

Top Dog

By William Almon Wolff

The story of a mix-up in identities as strange as the case of
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

September Short Stories by

Arthur B. Reeve (Craig Kennedy) (See page 112)
I. A. R. Wylie
Bonnie Ginger
W. Carey Wonderly
Walter De Leon and others

And Three Serial Novels

Mellowing Money
Thoroughbred
The Bucoleon Treasure

September *EVERYBODY'S*—out August 15th

Lucifer

Ruthlessness Sometimes Goes Unpunished, and the Ruthless Enjoy the Fruits of Their Misdoings, in Spite of the Demands of Popular Sentiment to the Contrary

By Achmed Abdullah

FOR years the three Pell Street merchants had traded with Ta Chen, the Peking millionaire, by correspondence, acting as his American brokers and gaining large sums in commissions punctually paid. Ta Chen, whose name was a household word wherever the yellow man did business at the expense and ignominy of the white man's beard, had casually mentioned former visits to America—to New York—in some of his letters. But they could not recall him; and this was strange, considering the clannishness of the Chinese abroad and their tight, intimate gossiping, considering, furthermore, that a man of his wealth could not have passed unnoticed through the shuffling, felt-slippered crowds. Nor, though they eagerly searched the back cells of their brains for a glint of remembrance, were they able to place him now, when they had gone to meet him at the Grand Central Station in answer to his telegram from San Francisco that he had arrived on a sudden business trip and was proceeding to New York.

He, on the other hand, recognized the older two of the three, called them by name, made rapid, sardonic comments, proving that he was familiar with their reputations and peculiarities.

"Ah, Yung Long!" He smiled. "It is years since I have seen you. Do you still braid ribbons into your cue to lengthen it? Do women's hearts still flutter when you pass through the mazes of Pell Street?"

And to Nag Sen Yat:

"You have not changed the least bit, O brother very wise and very old! Tell me"—the typical wealthy Chinese who could afford to cause a loss of face to poorer men—"do you still cheat your belly to swell your money-bags?"

While Nag Sen Yat stammered for a rejoinder, Ta Chen looked questioningly at the third, the youngest.

"And you are——"

"I am Nag Cha Lee."

"Ah! Of the Nag clan?"

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"You were born after my time. Your father is——"

"Nag Hop Fat."

"Ah! The soothsayer. He is still alive? His soul has not yet jumped the Dragon Gate?"

"He is old and feeble, but still alive."

"The which is luck for the excellent Lord," came Ta Chen's slurring comment. "For doubtless in the beyond your father would succeed in cheating the very Buddha. I knew your father well. Twice he told my fortune with the painted sticks—and twice he lied. Had he told my fortune again, he would have lied three times."

Nag Cha Lee was intensely Chinese in his filial veneration for his aged if disreputable father. A harsh reply bubbled to his lips. He changed it into a cough at the suggestion of his cousin Nag Sen Yat's bony thumb boring into his ribs. He was silent. So were the other two. They did not know what to say. To tell Ta Chen that they did not remember him would be a gross breach of manners, and they were his brokers, gaining largely by his shrewd generosity. They sucked in their breath, blushed slightly as they saw the expression on his face—amused, cynical, as if he had read their minds, had unraveled the coiling, nervous twists in their brains.

So they looked at each other from beneath lowered eyelids, bowed with hands clasped across chests and bade him welcome in courtly, stilted phrases.

"*I lou fou sing*—may the star of happiness always illuminate your path!"

"Ten thousand years!"

"Ten thousand times ten thousand years!"

"And yet another year!" Suddenly, at least in external pomp of Mongol breeding, Ta Chen became as polite as the others.

Then he turned to the negro red-cap who carried his suitcases, with clipped East Side jargon which proved beyond a doubt that, sometime, somehow, he had indeed been a denizen of Chinatown's viscous, sluttish reek.

"Say—wottahell d'yeh mean slingin' my bags about as if they was iron? For two cents I'd bust yeh one on the bean—see?"

And to Yung Long, smiling:

"Ah! I have not forgotten my English."

All this very much to the surprise of the red-cap, who mumbled:

"Ah beg yo' pa'don, Captain! Ah didn't know as yo' was a white gen'l'man," to the surprise of several unclassified New Yorkers hurrying through the station to catch the eleven-o'-clock train for Albany, to the ever-growing surprise, finally, of Ta Chen's countrymen. Who was he, they wondered. Why could they not recall him? Why did the fact of their not being able to do so upset their equanimity?

Nag Sen Yat stared at Ta Chen. A fleeting glint of remembrance came to him. Where had he seen those opaque eyes, those thin lips, those heavy jowls? The half-remembrance passed. But on the spur of the moment he made up his mind to ask the other straight out.

"Forgive me," he began, "but——"

He had no time to finish the sentence. Ta Chen interrupted calmly, as if he had guessed what the query would be.

"You reserved rooms for me as I telegraphed?"

"Yes. At the guest-house of the Hip Sing Tong."

"Thank you. Ah"—as they entered the taxi-cab—"it is good to be back in New York. What shall we do to-night?"

"We arranged a little private dinner-party."

"Delightful!"

"At Nag Hong Fah's place——"

"The Great Shanghai Chop-Suey Palace? I remember it well. Who will be at the dinner?"

"Just you, and we three, and Tsing Yu-ch'ing."

"Who is he?"

"The editor of the *Eminent Elevation*, our local Chinese newspaper."

"A new venture—since my time. You invited the editor—ah—to gain face?" Ta Chen demanded brusquely.

"Yes," admitted Yung Long.

TSING YU-CH'ING had indeed been asked to the dinner so that he might report it in the next issue of his tiny weekly and thus help the three merchants to gain face, businessly as well as socially. Already Pell Street had heard about Ta Chen's arrival, had heard about the dinner. Already Pell Street envied. Yet that same night, knowing Pell Street's envy, the three were not happy. They were, somehow, afraid. Nor was there a reason for it. There was nothing in Ta Chen's words or manners to inspire uneasiness. On the contrary. He had been smilingly polite all evening. He had given them large orders over the sharks'-fins and birds'-nest soup, had promised them larger orders when Ling Yang, the waiter, had brought in the duck cooked sweet and pungent, the braised bamboo-sprouts, and an exquisite pale-blue Suen-tih Ming bowl filled with pickled star-fruit.

Now the dishes had been cleared away—all except the bottles of rice gin and the glasses. Ling Yang had arranged a low tabouret with a jar of treacly first-chop opium, needles, horn and ivory boxes, lamps, pipes and all the other meticulous paraphernalia for the smoking of the kindly, philosophic drug; and Tsing Yu-ch'ing, the editor, had toasted Ta Chen in charming, flowery language, comparing him, after the Pekingese manner, to dawn reddening the black wake of night, to a river jeweled with summer hues, and to purple leaves carpeting the forest for autumn's avatar.

Ta Chen sat smoking serenely. Gorged, he seemed, as much with food as with a gross, blotchy surfeit of prosperity. Sleepy, he seemed, and comfortable. But when he opened his eyes there was in their depths a strange expression. "Like the memory of ancient sin," Tsing Yu-ch'ing described it afterward; "proud, consciously unrepenting sin." And the three merchants sensed it, quailed under it, tried to reassure each other with slanting glances, with discreet coughs, with gliding, crooked smiles.

Nag Cha Lee felt it more intensely than the other two. Ta Chen's remark of that morning about his father had rankled in his heart. During the evening he had drunk a great deal of heady rice gin. He had smoked six opium-pipes. He drank two more glasses of gin, smoked another pipe. He was slightly dizzy. He was sure—clearly sure—of only two things: his fear of Ta Chen and, resultant from this fear, his hate. It was the hate, not the fear, which suggested revenge. He poured himself another glass. Again, with shaking fingers, he reached for the opium-jar. He filled his pipe and smoked, inflating his lungs, letting out the pungent fumes in tiny, vaporous globules that sank to the floor and ran along the matting. And, as the poppy-ghosts drew swiftly about him on silver-gray wings, building round him a wall of dreamy, gossamer clouds, the fear disappeared temporarily. Reminded only the hate, the lust for revenge. He watched his opportunity.

It came shortly afterward.

Ta Chen had turned to Yung Long. He was holding forth on the worth of old age, by the same token ridiculing the claims of youth.

"Age is a fig tree, strong and tall and straight, bearing sweet fruit," he pronounced, "while youth"—with suave irony and a subtly derisive look at Nag Cha Lee—"the worth of youth in the reckoning of life is tinier than a rice-corn or a barleycorn or a mustard-seed—or the pulp of a mustard-seed."

Yung Long smiled. He, too, looked at Nag Cha Lee. Often in the past had the latter scratched his thin-skinned Mongol prejudices by tactless, youthful boasting.

"You are right," he said.

He laughed. So did Nag Sen Yat. So did Tsing Yu-ch'ing.

And then Nag Cha Lee blurted out suddenly that, speaking of fig trees, once his father—"who does not always lie"—had told him a legend "which"—addressing Ta Chen direct—"might be of interest to you, O wise and older brother!"

"Ah?" the other inquired.

"Indeed. For one day the Buddha asked one of his disciples what was the secret of the fig-tree's worth, and the disciple saying that it was the fig, the Buddha replied, 'Bring me a fig.' 'Lo, my Lord,' came the disciple's answer, 'I have brought a fig!' 'Break it.' 'It is broken, my Lord.' 'What seest thou in it?' 'Lo, little seeds, my Lord!' 'Break one of the seeds.' 'It is broken, my Lord.' 'And what seest thou in it?' 'Nought my Lord, except a void.' And," Nag Cha Lee wound up, "out of this void rises the seed, out of the seed the fig, out of the fig the fig tree—the fig tree, belike, of old age, great age, wise age. Still—let us all have faith in the Buddha's blessed miracles. Perhaps—ah—perhaps in this void of the broken seed the All of old age finds indeed its final, precious essence."

THUS came the insult, deadly and unforgivable from the oblique Chinese angle—insult that, typically, implied more than it spoke. And silence dropped.

Yung Long drew from his sleeve a tiny fan exquisitely embroidered with butterflies and opened it slowly. Nag Sen Yat sat like a statue, his face expressionless, only the Adam's apple in his scrawny throat rising and falling and betraying the excitement that swept over him in waves. Tsing Yu-ch'ing watched eagerly, his keen, reportorial brain alive to every word and gesture and impression.

Nag Cha Lee himself, his words beyond recall, had suddenly become sober once more—sober and terribly afraid. He squirmed in his chair, thinking of credit and discounts and future business and Ta Chen's swollen money-bags; thinking, too, that he was hard-pressed for cash and that, in the last transaction with the Pekingese, he had paid the latter by a six months' note which was due and which, earlier in the evening, as a matter of course, he had asked Ta Chen to renew.

The latter leaned forward a little.

"Younger brother," he said, "about that five-thousand-dollar note which you asked me to renew——"

And after a pause full of elusive suspicions and hesitations—a pause splintered by Nag Cha Lee's hysterical stammering that he didn't care, that he meant what he had said, that he would not apologize and eat dirt, even though it ruined him financially—Ta Chen continued very gently:

"I shall renew the note. I also asked you to sell for me three thousand bales of that easily placed Cantonese crape, didn't I? Very well. Make it four thousand bales."

The other's relief was sudden, ludicrous and complete.

"You mean it?" he asked, between laughing and crying.

"Yes."

"But—oh—why——"

"You are young and so, perhaps, you were a little envious of my wealth, my claim to respect, my regrettable habit of causing younger, poorer men to lose face—is that right? Come; confess, little brother."

"Yes."

"It is natural. During youth, envy and desire are like roses on a bush, to be plucked regardless of thorns. Youth is so careless. I like it. I admire its strength, its courage, its arrogant ruthlessness. I, too, once—" He interrupted himself. A slow flame eddied up in his eyes. His hand stabbed dramatically out of the poppy vapors and pointed like a pistol at Yung Long's chest. "You remember me?"

"I—oh——"

"I want the truth!"

"I do not remember you."

"And"—Ta Chen turned to Nag Sen Yat—"do you?"

"No, O wise and older brother!"

"*Hayah!*"

Ta Chen smiled a crooked, wintry smile. He rose, walked to the window, opened it, flung the shutters wide. Chinatown jumped into the focus, hiccoughing through the sooty dusk with luminous colored flame, crimson and green and sharp saffron, blaring shamelessly the symphony of its grimy bastard world. His hand took in at one sweep the whole Mongol and half-breed maze that teemed and cursed and sweated below—the rickety, secretive brick dwellings, the painted bird's-nest balconies, the furtive shops, the scarlet-smeared joss temple, the stealthy, enigmatic alleys, the little mission chapel, lonely here amidst the spicy, warm reeks of opium and sandalwood and grease and incense, like a drab, insistent stain upon Pell Street's tough, sneering yellow nakedness. His hand swept on. It pointed east, toward the Bowery, leering up with a mawkish, tawdry face, toward the elevated road, a block away, rushing like the surge of a far sea. West swept the hand, where Broadway leaped toward the Battery with pinchbeck stucco and the blatant, stridently alive vitality of its shops and lofts.

"This," said Ta Chen, "was once my world—the world which, being young and poor, I envied—the world which, being strong and ruthless, I forced to disgorge."

HE CLOSED the window, stepped back into the room and stopped in front of Nag Sen Yat and Yung Long.

"You do not remember me?"

"No," replied Nag Sen Yat, though again clogged cells in his brain trembled with the effort to place those thin lips, those heavy jowls, those opaque, ironic eyes.

"I remember neither your face nor your name," agreed Yung Long.

"As to my name, I changed it—for reasons. Twenty-five years ago I was known as 'Wah Kee.' "

"Wah Kee?" puzzled Yung Long.

"An ordinary name," commented the newspaper editor, "like 'John Smith' among the coarse-haired barbarians."

"But they nicknamed me 'Yat-Pak-Man'—'One Million'—because I boasted that I would earn a million before I died."

"Yat-Pak-Man—" The clogged cells in Nag Sen Yat's brain opened wider. Then full remembrance came with a rush, to be checked immediately by his incredulity. "Impossible!"

"Impossible!" echoed Yung Long. "Yat-Pak-Man is——"

"What?" asked Ta Chen.

"Dead."

"Murdered!" Yung Long chimed in.

"He is alive," came Ta Chen's flat, cozy accents, with just the brittle suspicion of a laugh. "He has made his million, and more millions, and"—dropping his voice to a minatory purr—"he gives you orders to buy and sell for him. You are in his debt, deeply in his debt, eh? And yet"—turning to Nag Cha Lee—"twenty-five years ago I used to envy these two—oh, yes! For they were already well-to-do, while I was poor. I envied them. I envied all Pell Street. But most did I envy Gin Ma-Fu——"

"The miser?" interrupted Nag Sen Yat.

"Yes. He was a worse miser even than you. A miser—and a hypocrite—like the cat which killed nine hundred mice and then went on pilgrimage."

"I remember," said Yung Long; "a miser, indeed—and a criminal. He did not even stop at murder to swell his money-bags."

"Whom did he murder?" asked Tsing Yu-ch'ing.

"He murdered Yat-Pak-Man."

"No!" Ta Chen smiled. "I repeat—I am alive. My soul has not yet jumped the Dragon Gate."

AND he told how, many years earlier, he had come to New York, a poor, ignorant coolie, working for a pittance, how, finally, he had become messenger for Soey Kwai, the wealthy private banker.

"Soey Kwai," he said, "was very Americanized. He married a white woman. He named his son 'George Washington.' He made me dress in a blue uniform with brass buttons—just like the bank-messengers of the foreign devils. And he paid me fifteen dollars a month. *Hayah!* I could not save a cent, though I pinched my belly and shriveled my bones. And I wanted money—*yat-pak-man*—a million! I knew that dollars are golden pills that cure all ills. Give gold to the dog—and all the world will call him 'mandarin dog.' Three thousand dollars, I used to say, was what I needed for a start. After that I would rely on my own brain and strength. But I could not save a cent, and Pell Street laughed at me—called me 'Yat-Pak-Man.'"

Nag Sen Yat sighed reminiscently.

"Yes—yes—Yat-Pak-Man——"

He stared at the other, utterly fascinated, convinced now that he recognized him. Yat-Pak-Man, Soey Kwai's messenger, who had been Pell Street's butt with his eternal talk about the million that he was going to earn! Yat-Pak-Man, whom he had thought dead, murdered! And he wondered—feared—and his leathery, angular features became marked by an expression of almost ludicrous alarm. He looked at Yung Long as if for help. The latter, too, was frightened. His jaw felt swollen, out of joint. His hands opened and shut convulsively.

Nag Cha Lee, on the other hand, was no longer afraid but frankly curious.

"But," he asked, "as bank-messenger you handled large sums. Didn't you feel tempted to——"

"To steal? No. To feel temptation you must feel that temptation is wrong. I did not. I had no scruples. My hand was against the world."

"Then why didn't you——"

"I feared the law. No other reason. But the desire in me grew stronger and stronger. Desire — envy — jealousy — hate—resolve! Like ghosts they were about me—all day, when I hurried through the streets, my black-leather bag filled with money and commercial paper, when I saw the rich Pell Street merchants in their houses and shops, and at night, when I lay in my little room above Soey Kwai's bank. Yes—desire and hate and envy—jealousy—resolve—and ruthlessness! Like ghosts! At first these ghosts—gray ghosts, crimson ghosts—had but the faintest spark of life, stirring me up so little that they left no more than a blurred, indistinct impression upon my soul. Again they would rise, look at me reproachfully, telling me to stop thinking and to act, act, act—to seize my chance by the throat. Then they would squat in the corner of my room and mock me and leer at me, call me a fool, a weakling, a coward. 'Yat-Pak-Man!' they would sneer. 'Yat-Pak-Man, you will never make your million unless you listen to us.' And—*hayah!*—I would go into the street, and the little ghosts would come along; they would stick to my hair, my clothes, my fingers, my tongue. I could feel them and smell them and taste them—and then, one day, they crystallized into a fact. I made up my mind——"

"To do what?"

"To rob and murder Gin Ma-Fu, the miser."

"No, no!" exclaimed Nag Cha Lee, horror-stricken.

"Yes, yes!" mocked Ya Chen. "Did I not tell you that I wanted money? Did I not tell you that I had made up my mind, and that my hand was against the world? It was thus the Buddha created me. Curse the Buddha, or bless him—as you wish. I, personally, hold not by the yellow Buddha. I hold by myself—to myself, for myself enough!" His voice rose clear and high and challenging. "Yes! I made up my mind to rob and murder Gin Ma-Fu."

Came a heavy pall of silence. Outside, in the pantry, Ling Yang, the waiter, had his ear glued to the keyhole. Inside, the four listeners carefully avoided looking at each other. Their faces were like carved masks. The smoke wreaths of tobacco and poppy drifted to the ceiling and hung down like an immense, transparent beehive. Through the shutters the Pell Street symphony leaked in with a thin wedge of sound.

A policeman whistled shrilly. A barrel-organ creaked a nostalgic Sicilian melody. The elevated rushed.

"Carefully I attended to every detail," continued Ta Chen, with slow deliberation. "Gin Ma-Fu lived all alone in a small house on Mott Street. He kept no servant. He cooked his own meals, swept the house himself. But he had one peculiarity: he hated the cold. So he, the miser, had had a large and expensive American furnace installed in his cellar, which, all through the winter, he kept at a red heat with his own hands."

"Yes; I remember," whispered Nag Sen Yat, then was silent, frightened at the sound of his own voice.

"It was part of my duty," went on Ta Chen, "to bring him every Monday morning three thousand dollars in cash, which he needed for small loans. I waited for a certain Monday morning when—ah, I was so careful!—I had other sums in my bag, a very large black bag, besides Gin Ma-Fu's three thousand. The night before—unusual luxury which I could ill afford—I went to the Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment to smoke a pipe and sip a cup of tea. There, in the presence of Gin Ma-Fu and several witnesses, I mentioned casually that I had to visit two or three people the next morning, that I would carry a considerable amount of cash, and that I hoped no gunman of the foreign barbarians would hold me up. Came Monday morning. It was very cold. I went to Gin Ma-Fu's house. On former visits I had noticed a heavy hammer which was always in a corner near the door. As soon as I entered I asked him for a glass of water. He turned. I picked up the hammer. I felled and killed him at one blow. Then, carefully, unhurriedly, I went to work. I locked both outside doors. I dragged the corpse into the cellar. The furnace was at full blast. And then—*hayah!*—there was myself—my strength—my ruthless resolve. There was a sharp knife; there was the furnace. And after a while there was no trace at all of Gin Ma-Fu except a heap of charred bones. Then I took off my blue uniform and burnt it in the furnace after tearing off a few ragged pieces and two or three brass buttons which I dropped here and there. I plucked a handful of hair from my cue and stuck it in the blood on the hammer. I hid hammer and knife behind a heap of coal. I opened my leather bag, took out the money and a change of clothes which I had brought with me, dressed, went up-stairs, opened the street door, watched my chance and slipped out. Three weeks later, traveling circuitously, I arrived in Seattle. Seven weeks later I was in China. I heard afterward how the police of the foreign barbarians discovered my charred bones, the ragged pieces of blue uniform, the brass buttons, the hammer with blood—his blood—and hair—my hair, how they reconstructed the crime—the miser murdering the bank-messenger because of the money which the latter carried in his bag. The miser, the assassin, was never found, although the police of three continents searched for him."

CAME again silence, dropping like a pall. Only the sizzling of the opium-pipes, a smacking of pursed lips as Nag Cha Lee, prey to terrible excitement, scalded his throat with hot tea.

Yung Long looked at Nag Sen Yat. The latter looked back, slowly closing one heavy-lidded, opium-reddened eye. There was an exchange of wordless questions and answers. These two understood each other. As for Nag Cha Lee, the third, the youngest, they would talk to him afterward. But here was Ta Chen, the millionaire, their best client. Here was, furthermore, Tsing Yu-ch'ing, the newspaper man, keenly alive to every word and gesture. It was one thing to gossip—to gossip with other Chinese. That did not matter; it was a sealed book to the coarse-haired barbarians. But there was the *Eminent Elevation* which, though written in Chinese, was read—and understood—every week by certain foreigners at police headquarters.

Yung Long cleared his throat. He must be careful and circumspect, he thought, lest he should lose too much face.

"Life," he began sententiously, "is as

uncertain as a Tatar's beard." He turned to Tsing Yu-ch'ing. "Little brother!" he called with a clear voice.

"Yes?"

"Ta Chen has delighted our worthless ears with the elegant and exquisite harmonies of his words."

"Indeed!" chimed in Nag Sen Yat sonorously, while Ta Chen watched, silent, an ironic smile curling his lips.

"Ta Chen," continued Yung Long, "has woven for our enjoyment a delicious fairy-tale, yet a fairy-tale which, belike, would miss its point if reprinted in the *Eminent Elevation*—chiefly considering that I own a controlling interest in this esteemed and valuable newspaper. You understand?"

"Quite," replied Tsing Yu-ch'ing.

"Very well. As for myself"—Yung Long turned to Ta Chen—"permit me to thank you. I enjoyed your fairy-tale—every word of it. It was worthy of the most delightful classic traditions of the black-haired race."

"Ah, yes!" agreed Nag Sen Yat. "Worthy of Han Yu and Ts'ui Hao and all the other poets of the glorious T'ang dynasty."

"But," came Ta Chen's purring query, "suppose the fairy-tale is true. Suppose I am really a murderer."

"Then," replied Yung Long shamelessly, "I would say that you are a very rich man. I would say, furthermore, that every man should clear away the snow from his own housetop."

"Yes, yes!" Nag Sen Yat smiled. "It is written in the Book of the Yellow Emperor that it is only the relative value which makes evil evil—and good good."

"And you," asked Ta Chen, addressing Nag Cha Lee; "what would you say?"

Nag Cha Lee did not look up.

"Who am I," he whispered, "the very little and worthless one, to bandy words with my wise and older brothers?"

Then laughter, sharp, crackling, pitiless, and Ta Chen made a derisive gesture with thumb and second finger.

"Ahee! Ahoo!" he cried. "It is true! Dollars are golden pills which cure all ills. Give gold to a dog—and all the world will call him 'mandarin dog'."

AND many weeks later, when Ta Chen had returned to China, while his three agents were coining a rich harvest through the orders which he had left behind, Tsing Yu-ch'ing, the editor, who was Harvard-bred and a good Baptist, discussed the happening with Ling Yang, the waiter, who had listened through the keyhole.

He made enigmatic allusion to Ta Chen's brain reminding him of moonbeams shining in silver unison on three cups of mottled jade, and emphasizing, not their own glittering falseness but the flaws in the latter.

To which Ling Yang, American-born, replied:

"Wottya givin' us—silver moonbeams and cups o' jade? I ain't got no idea if Ta Chen lied or spilled the truth. But, either way, he made them greedy three fatheads lose plenty face. That's all—see?"

"You think so?" Tsing Yu-ch'ing smiled.

"Sure!"

"He had no other reasons?"

"No."

"You are wrong."

"How come?"

"I myself," said the editor, "believe that Ta Chen told the truth. He told it for one of two reasons. For one, the crime weighed on his conscience. And, like many a murderer before him, he returned to the place of the crime. He decided to confess—to make a clean breast of it. He did so. But, being a shrewd man, he did it in such a way that it did not hurt him—ah—from a worldly angle. The other possibility——"

"Well?"

"Lucifer," said Tsing Yu-ch'ing laconically.

"Wottya mean?"

"Aren't you a Christian?"

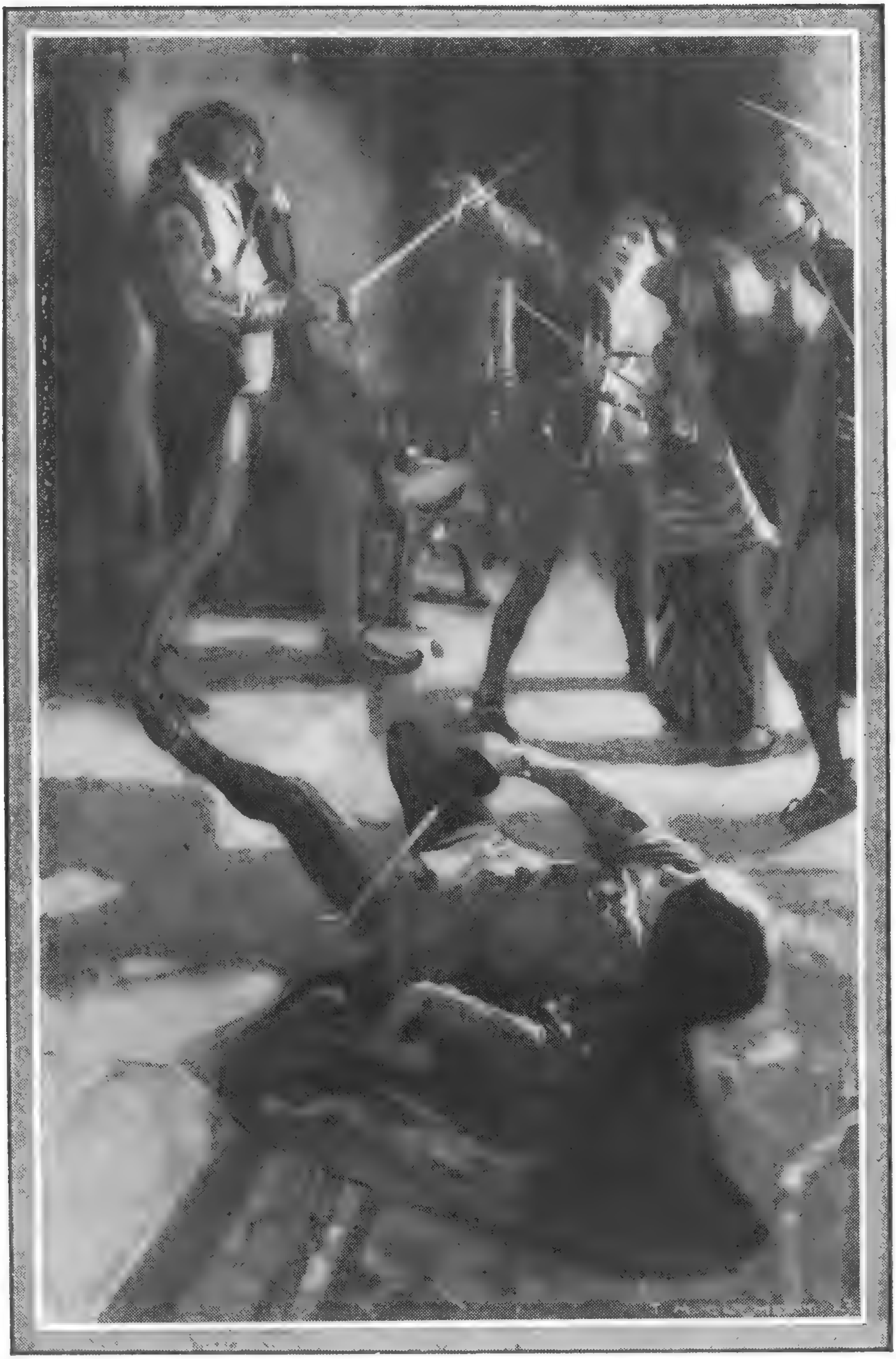
"Yeh bet I am, bo! And a damn sight better one than you are—see?"

"Well then, don't you know who Lucifer was?"

"Sure! The—aw—fallen angel, eh?"

"Yes. The fallen angel who gloried in his wicked deed, who never repented. Ah! There was that expression in Ta Chen's eyes when he told about the murder, like the memory of ancient sin, proud, consciously unrepenting sin. Lucifer! And who knows if Lucifer was right or wrong—if Ta Chen was right or wrong? You see—at times I forget that I am a Christian, a Baptist, and then——"

"G'wan; ye're nutty!" cut in Ling Yang, the waiter.



Another instant and they had closed with him, their whirling blades athirst for his life.

A Novel Complete in This Issue

The Venetian

A Bungler Fared Worse with Cesare Borgia Than a Traitor. But He Observed the Amenities in Dealing with Both. Another Romance of the Opulent Days When Revenge Was Accounted One of the Fine Arts

By Rafael Sabatini

Illustrations by J. M. Clement

HE WHO is great shall never lack for enemies. He has to reckon first with lesser great ones, whose ambitions he thwarts by his own success, outstripping and overshadowing them; and he has to reckon further with those insignificant parasites of humanity who, themselves utterly unproductive of aught that shall benefit their race, writhe in the secret consciousness of their utter worthlessness and spit the venom of their malice at him who has achieved renown. In this they no more than obey the impulses of their paltry natures. The greatness of another wounds them in their own self-love. They readily become detractors and defamers, conceiving that if in the public mind they can pull down the object of their envy, they have lessened the gulf between themselves and him. Fluent—if undeceiving—liars, they go to work through the medium of that, their sole and very questionable gift. They lie of their own prowess, importance and achievement, that thus they may puff themselves up to an apparently greater stature, and they lie maliciously and cruelly concerning the object of their envy, belittling his attainments, slandering him in his private and public life, and smothering his repute in the slime of their foul inventions.

By such signs shall you know them—for a fool is ever to be known by these two qualities: his inordinate vanity and his falsehood, which usually is no more than an expression of that vanity. But his falsehood, being naturally of the measure of his intelligence, deceives none but his own kind.

Such a thing was Messer Paolo Capello, orator of the Most Serene Republic, a servant chosen to forward the Venetian hatred of Cesare Borgia. Venice watched the duke's growing power in Italy with ever-increasing dismay. She saw herself threatened by a serious rival in the peninsula, by one, indeed, who might come to eclipse her own resplendent glory, even if he did not encroach upon her mainland territories. That jealousy of hers distorted her judgment of him, for she permitted herself judgment and applied to him the only canons that she knew, as if men of genius are to be judged by the standards that govern the lives of haberdashers and spice merchants. Thus Venice became Cesare's most crafty, inplacable enemy in Italy, and an enemy for whose hand no weapon was too vile.

Gladly would the Venetians have moved in arms against him, to attempt to crush this man who snatched the Romagna from under their covetous traders' eyes; but in view of the league with France, they dared not. Yet what they dared they did. They sought to disturb his relations with King Louis, and, failing there, they sought alliances with other states to which normally they were hostile, and when there again they failed, thanks to a guile more keen and intelligent than their own, they had recourse to the common weapons of the assassin and the slanderer.

For the latter task they had a ready tool in that ineffable and worthless Messer Capello, sometime their orator at the Vatican; for the former task they chose another, of whom we shall hear more presently.

This Capello was of the slipperiness of all slimy things. And he worked in the dark, burrowing underground and never affording the duke a plain reason that should have justified extreme measures against the sacred person of an ambassador. How he came to escape assassination in the early days of his infamous career I have never understood. I look upon its omission as one of Cesare Borgia's few really great blunders. A hired bravo with a dagger on some dark night might have stemmed that source of foulness, leaving the name of Cesare Borgia and of every member of his family less odious to posterity.

WHEN Giovanni Borgia, Duke of Gandia, was murdered in the pursuit of one of his frivolous amours, and no murderer could be discovered—though many possible ones were named, from his own brother Gioffredo to Ascanio Sforza, the cardinal vice-chancellor—there came at last from Venice, a year after the deed, the accusation, unsupported by any single shred of evidence, that the deed of fratricide was Cesare's. When Pedro Caldes—or Perrotto, as he was called—the pope's chamberlain, fell into the Tiber and was drowned, came from Venice a lurid tale—supplied, as we know, from the fertile, unscrupulous pen of Messer Capello—of how Cesare had stabbed the wretch in the pope's very arms; and although no man admittedly had witnessed the deed, yet Messer Capello gave the most circumstantial details, even to how the blood had spurted up into the face of his Holiness. When the unfortunate Turkish prince, the Sultan Djem, died of a colic at Naples, it is Capello who started the outrageous story that he was poisoned by Cesare, and again he circulated the like calumny when the Cardinal Giovanni Borgia succumbed to a fever in the course of a journey through Romagna. And if this were all—or if all the calumny that Capello invented had been concerned with no more than steel and poison—we might be patient in our judgment of him.

But there was worse—far worse. There was indeed no dunghill of calumny too foul to be exploited by him in the interests of the Most Serene. His filthy pen grew, fevered in the elaboration of the lewd gossip that he picked up in curial antechambers, and in marking out Cesare Borgia for its victim, it yet spared no member of his family, but included all in the abominations it invented or magnified. Most of them have passed into history, where they may be read but not necessarily believed. I will not sully this fair sheet with their recapitulation.

Thus was it that Messer Paolo Capello served the Most Serene Republic. But because his services, frenzied though they were, seemed slow to bear the fruit which the Most Serene so ardently desired, other and more direct methods than those of calumny were resolved upon. The Venetians took this resolve in mid-October of the year 1500 of the Incarnation and eighth of the papacy of Roderigo Borgia, who ruled from the chair of St. Peter as Alexander VI; and what urged them to it was to see Pandolfo Malatesta, whom they had protected, driven out of his tyranny of Rimini, and that tyranny of his, which they had coveted, pass by right of conquest—based upon certain legal papal rights—into the possession of Cesare Borgia, further to swell his dominions and his might.

The Most Serene Republic conceived that the hour had come for sharper measures than such as were afforded her by the scurrilous gleanings and inventions of her orator. As her agent in this sinister affair, she employed a patrician who held the interests of Venice very dear—a man who was bold, resolute and resourceful, and whose hatred of the Duke of Valentinois was notoriously so intense as to seem an almost personal matter. This man—the Prince Marcantonio Sinibaldi—she despatched to Rimini as her envoy extraordinary for the express purpose, ostensibly, of conveying her lying felicitations to the duke upon his conquest.

As if to emphasize the peaceful and friendly character of his mission, Sinibaldi was accompanied by his princess, a very beautiful and accomplished lady of the noble House of Alviano. The pair made their appearance in Rimini surrounded by a pomp and luxury of retinue that was extraordinary even for the pompous and wealthy republic which they represented.

The princess was borne in a horse-litter carried by two milk-white Barbary jennets, whose embroidered trappings of crimson velvet swept the ground. The litter itself was a gorgeous construction, gilded and painted like a bride's coffer and hung with curtains that were of cloth of gold, upon each of which was woven in red the device of the winged lion of St. Mark. About this litter swarmed a host of pages, all of them lads of patrician estate, in the livery of the republic.

There were mounted Nubian swordsmen in magnificent barbaric garments, very terrifying of aspect; there were some dozen turbaned Moorish slaves on foot, and finally there was a company of a score of arbalesters on horseback, as a body-guard of honor for the splendid prince himself. The prince, a handsome, resplendent figure, towered upon a magnificent charger, with a groom trotting afoot at either of his stirrups. After him came a group of his personal familiars—his secretary, his venom-taster, his chaplain and his almoner, which last flung handfuls of silver coins at the mob to impress it with his master's munificence and to excite its acclamations of his illustrious person.

The good folk of Rimini were dazzled and dazed again by a spectacle of so much magnificence.

Sinibaldi was housed—and this by the contriving of our friend Capello—in the palace of the Lord Ranieri, a sometime member of the banished Malatesta's council, but none the less one of those who had been loudest in welcoming the conqueror, Cesare, acclaiming him in a speech of surpassing eloquence as Rimini's deliverer.

The duke had not been deluded by these fine phrases. Far from it, he was inspired by them to have a close watch set upon Malatesta's sometime councilor. Neither was he at all deluded by the no less fine phrases of felicitations addressed him on behalf of the Most Serene by her envoy extraordinary, Sinibaldi. He knew too much—for he had received superabundant proof—of Venice's real attitude toward himself. He answered them with words fully as graceful and fully as hollow. And when he learned that, under himself, Ranieri was to be Sinibaldi's host in Rimini, that both these nimble phrase-makers were to lie under one roof, he bade his secretary, Agabito, see to it that the vigilance under which that palace was already kept should be increased.

TO MEET Sinibaldi, it must be confessed that Ranieri—a portly, florid gentlemen with a bright and jovial blue eye, the very antithesis in appearance to the conspirator of tradition—had assembled an odd company. There was Francesco d'Alviano, a younger brother of that famous soldier, Bartolommeo d'Alviano, than whom it was notorious that the duke had no more implacable enemy; there was the young Galeazzo Sforza, of Catignola, bastard brother to Giovanni Sforza, the divorced husband of Cesare's lovely sister Lucrezia, lately dispossessed by the duke of his tyranny of Pesaro; and there were four others—three patricians, who are of little account, and, lastly, Pietro Corvo, that notorious, plebeian Forlivese scoundrel who under the name of Corvinus Trismegistus had once, to his undoing, practised magic. In spite of all that he had already suffered by it, he could not refrain from thrusting himself into the affairs of the great.

Now no man knew better than the astute and watchful Duke of Valentinois the art of discovering traitors. He did not wait for them to reveal themselves by their actions—for he knew that by then it might be too late to deal with them. He preferred to unmask their conspiracies while they were maturing. And of all the methods that he employed, the one to which he trusted most was that of the decoy.

Suspecting—and with excellent grounds—that treason was hatching in that gloomy palace of Ranieri's overlooking the Marecchia, he bade his secretary, Agabito, put it abroad through his numerous agents that several of the duke's prominent officers were disaffected toward him. Particular stress was laid upon the disaffection of an ambitious and able young captain named Angelo Graziani, toward whom it was urged that the duke had behaved with marked injustice, so that this Graziani notoriously waited an opportunity to be avenged.

This gossip spread with the speed of all vile rumors. It was culled in the taverns by the Lord Ranieri's spies, who bore it swiftly to their master. With Graziani's name was coupled that of Ramiro de Lorqua, at present the duke's governor of Cesena, and for a while Ranieri and Sinibaldi hesitated between the two. In the end their choice fell upon Graziani. De Lorqua was the more powerful man and wielded the greater influence. But their needs did not require so much. Graziani was now temporarily in command of the duke's own patrician body-guard, and their plans were of such a nature that it was precisely a man in that position who could afford them the opportunity they sought. Moreover, the gossip concerning Graziani was more positive than that which concerned De Lorqua. There was even, in the former case, some independent evidence to support the tale that was abroad.

THE young captain himself was utterly unconscious alike of these rumors and of the test to which his fidelity to the duke was about to be submitted. Therefore he was amazed when, on the last day of October, as Prince Sinibaldi's visit to Rimini was drawing to its close, he found himself suddenly accosted by the Lord Ranieri with a totally unexpected invitation.

Graziani was in the ducal antechamber of the *rocca* at the time, and Ranieri was departing after a brief audience with his Highness. Our gentleman threaded his way through the courtly throng, straight to the captain's side.

"Captain Graziani," he said.

The captain, a tall, athletic fellow, whose plain raiment of steel and leather detached him from his silken surroundings, bowed stiffly.

"At your service, my lord," he replied, addressing Ranieri thus for the first time.

"Prince Sinibaldi, who is my exalted guest, has remarked you," he said, lowering his voice to a confidential tone. "He does you the honor to desire your better acquaintance. He has heard of you, and has, I think, a proposal to make to you that should lead to your rapid advancement."

Graziani, taken thus by surprise, flushed with gratified pride.

"But I am the duke's servant," he objected.

"A change may commend itself to you when you learn what is offered," replied Ranieri. "The prince honors you with the request that you wait upon him at my house at the first hour of night."

A little dazzled and flustered by the invitation, Graziani was surprised into accepting it. There could be no harm, no disloyalty to his duke, he reasoned in that brief moment of thought, in hearing what might be this proposal. After all, the exchange of service was permissible in a soldier of fortune.

"I will obey," he said, whereupon, with a nod and a smile, Ranieri went his way.

It was only afterward, when Graziani came to consider the matter more closely, that suspicion and hesitation were roused in him. Ranieri had said that the prince had remarked him. How should that have happened, since, as he now reflected, he had never been in Sinibaldi's presence? It was odd, he thought; and his thoughts, having started upon such a train as this, made swift progress. He knew enough of the politics of his day to be aware of the feelings entertained for Cesare Borgia by all Venetians, and he was sufficiently equipped with worldly wisdom to know that a man who, like Ranieri, could fawn upon the duke who had dethroned that Malatesta in whose favor and confidence he had so lately stood was not a man to be trusted.

Thus, you see, Graziani's doubts becoming suspicions; and very soon those suspicions grew to certainty. He scented treason in the proposal that Sinibaldi was to make him. If he went, he would most probably walk into a trap from which there might be no withdrawal; for when traitors reveal themselves they cannot, for their own lives' sake, spare the life of one who, being invited, refuses to become a party to that treason. Already Graziani saw himself in fancy with a hole in his heart, his limp body floating seaward down the Marecchia on the ebbing tide.

But if these forebodings urged him to forget his promise to wait upon Prince Sinibaldi, yet ambition whispered to him that, after all, he might be the loser through perceiving shadows where there was no real substance. Venice was in need of *condottieri;* the republic was wealthy and paid her servants well; in her service the chances of promotion might come more rapidly than in

Cesare Borgia's, since already almost every captain of fortune in Italy was serving under the banner of the duke. It was possible that in this business there might be no more than the Lord Ranieri had stated. He would go. Only a coward would remain absent out of fears for which grounds were not clearly apparent. But only a fool would neglect to take his measures for retreat or rescue in case his suspicions should be proved by the event well founded.

Therefore when, on the stroke of the first hour of night, Captain Graziani presented himself at the Ranieri Palace, he had ambushed a half-score of men about the street under the command of his faithful ancient, Barbo. To Barbo, at parting, he had given all the orders necessary.

"If I am in difficulties or in danger, I shall contrive to smash a window. Take that for your signal, assemble your men and break into the house at once. Let one of your knaves go round and watch the windows overlooking the Marecchia, in case I should be forced to give the signal from that side."

These measures taken, he went to meet the Venetian envoy with an easy mind.

THE young condottiero's tread was firm and his face calm when one of Sinibaldi's turbaned Moorish slaves, into whose care he had been delivered by the lackey who admitted him, ushered him into the long, low room of the mezzanine where the Venetian awaited him.

He had deemed the circumstance of the Moorish slave in itself suspicious; it seemed to argue that in this house of the Lord Ranieri's the prince was something more than guest, since his servants did the offices of ushers. And now, as he stood on the threshold and perceived that, in addition to the prince and the Lord Ranieri, there were six others present, he conceived it certain that his worst suspicion would be here confirmed.

This room into which he now stepped ran through the entire depth of the house, so that its windows overlooked the street at one end and the River Marecchia, near the Bridge of Augustus, at the other. It had an air at once rich and gloomy. The walls were hung with somber tapestries; the carpets spread upon the floor of wood mosaics were of a deep purple that was almost black, and amid its sparse furnishings there was a deal of ebony looking the more funereal by virtue of its ivory inlays. It was lighted by an alabaster-globed lamp set high upon the ponderous overmantel and by silver candle-branches on the long table in mid-apartment, about which the company was seated when Graziani entered. An enormous fire was roaring on the hearth, for the weather had lately set in raw and cold.

As the door was softly closed behind Graziani and as he stood adjusting his eyes to the strong light, the Lord Ranieri stepped forward with purring words of welcome, too cordial from one in his lordship's position to one in Graziani's. With these, he conducted the captain toward the table. From his seat at the head of it rose a tall and very stately gentleman with a long olive countenance that was rendered the longer by a brown pointed beard, who added a welcome of his own.

He was dressed all in black, but with a rare elegance, and upon his breast flashed a medallion of diamonds worth a nobleman's ransom. Graziani did not require to be told that this was Prince Sinibaldi, the envoy extraordinary of the Most Serene.

The *condottiero* bowed low, yet with a soldierly stiffness and a certain aloofness in his bearing that he could not quite dissemble. And his countenance remained grave and set.

Ranieri drew up a chair for him to the table at which the other six remained seated, twelve eyes intent upon the newcomer's face. Graziani gave them back look for look, but, of them all, the only one whose face he knew was Galeazzo Sforza, of Catignola, whom he had seen at Pesaro; for it was this Galeazzo himself who, in his brother's stead, had surrendered the place to Cesare Borgia. The captain's glance was next arrested by Pietro Corvo, the Forlivese who once had practised magic in Urbino. The fellow detached from this patrician group, as he must, for that matter, detach from any group in which he might chance to find himself. His face was as the face of a corpse; it was yellow as wax, and his skin was as a skin of parchment drawn tight across his prominent cheek-bones. His lank, thinning hair had faded to the color of ashes; his lips were bloodless; indeed, no part of his countenance seemed alive save only the eyes, which glittered as if he had the fever. He was repulsive beyond description, and no man who looked on him for the first time could repress a shudder.

One hand only remained him—his left—which was as yellow and gnarled as a hen's foot. Its fellow he had left in Urbino together with his tongue, having been deprived of one and the other by order of Cesare Borgia, whom he had defamed. That punishment was calculated to disable him from either writing or uttering further slanders; but he was fast learning to overcome the disabilities to which it had subjected him, and already he was beginning to write with that clawlike left hand that remained to him.

Well had it been for him had he confined himself to the practise of magic under his imposing name of Corvinus Trismegistus. Being a fertile-witted rogue, he had thriven exceedingly at that rascally trade, and might have continued to amass a fortune had he not foolishly drawn upon himself by his incautious slanders the attention of the Duke of Valentinois.

Having now no tongue left wherewith to beguile the credulous, or sufficient magic to grow a fresh one, his trade was ruined, and his hatred of the man who had ruined it was virulent—the more virulent, no doubt, since his expression of it had been temporarily curtailed.

His fierce, glittering eyes fastened mistrustfully upon Graziani as the young soldier took the chair that was offered him by his host. He parted his bloodless lips to make a horrible croaking sound that reminded Graziani of frogs on a hot night of summer, while he accompanied it by gestures to the Venetian which the captain did not attempt to understand.

THE Lord Ranieri resumed his seat at the table's foot. At its head, the prince remained standing, and he pacified the mute by a nod, conveying to him the assurance that he was understood. Then from the breast of his doublet the Venetian drew a small crucifix beautifully wrought in ivory upon gold. Holding it between his graceful, tapering fingers, he addressed the *condottiero* solemnly.

"When we shall have made known to you the reason for which we have sought your presence here to-night, Messer Graziani," said he, "it shall be yours to determine whether you will join hands with us and lend us your aid in the undertaking which we have in mind. Should you elect not to do so, be your reason what it may, you shall be free to depart as you have come. But first you must make solemn oath, engaging yourself neither by word spoken or written, nor yet by deed, to divulge aught of what may be revealed of our designs."

The prince paused, and stood waiting. Graziani reared his young head, and he could almost have laughed outright at this discovery of how shrewd and just had been the suspicions that had assailed him. He looked about him slowly, finding himself the goal of every eye, and every countenance alive with a mistrust and hostility that nothing could quiet short of that oath demanded of him.

It comforted him in that moment to think of Barbo and his knaves waiting below, in case they should be needed. If Graziani knew men at all, he would be likely to need them very soon, he thought.

Sinibaldi leaned forward, supporting himself upon his left hand, while with his right he gently pushed the crucifix down the table toward the captain.

"First, upon that sacred symbol of Our Redeemer—" he was beginning, when Graziani abruptly thrust back his chair and rose.

He knew enough. Here for certain was a conspiracy against the state or against the life of his lord, the Duke of Valentinois. It needed no more words to tell him that. He was neither spy nor informer, yet if he heard more and then kept secret, he would himself be a party to their treason.

"My lord Prince," he said, "here surely is some mistake. What you may be about to propose to me I do not know. But I do know—for it is abundantly plain—that it is no such proposal as my Lord Ranieri had led me to expect."

There was a savage, incoherent growl from the mute, but the others remained silent, waiting for the soldier to proceed.

"It is not my way," he went on gravely, "to thrust myself blindly into any business and make oath upon matters that are unknown to me. Suffer me, therefore, to take my leave of you at once. Sirs"—he included the entire company in his bow—"a happy night."

He stepped back from the table, clearly and firmly resolved upon departure, and on the instant every man present was upon his feet and every hand was upon a weapon. They were rendered desperate by their realization of the mistake that had been made. That mistake they must repair in the only way that was possible. Ranieri sprang away from the foot of the table and flung himself between the soldier and the door, barring his exit.

Checked thus, Graziani looked at Sinibaldi, but the smile upon the Venetian's saturnine countenance was not reassuring. It occurred to the captain that the time had come to break a window as a signal to Barbo, and he wondered would they prevent him from reaching one. First, however, he made appeal to Ranieri, who stood in his way.

"My lord," he said, and his voice was firm almost to the point of haughtiness, "I came hither in friendliness, bidden to your house with no knowledge of what might await me. I trust to your honor, my lord, to see that I depart in like case, and with no knowledge of what is here toward."

"No knowledge?" said Ranieri, and he laughed shortly. His countenance had lost by now every trace of its habitual joviality. "No knowledge, eh? But suspicions, no doubt, and these suspicions you will voice——"

"Let him take the oath!" cried the clear young voice of Galeazzo Sforza. "Let him swear to keep silent upon——"

But the steely accents of Sinibaldi cut in sharply upon that speech.

"Do you not see, Galeazzo, that we have misjudged our man?"

Graziani, however, confined his glance and his insistence to Ranieri.

"My lord," he said again, "it lies upon your honor that I shall go forth in safety. At your bidding——"

His keen ears caught a stealthy sound behind him, and he whipped round sharply. Even as he turned, Pietro Corvo, who had crept up softly, leaped upon him, fierce as a rat, his dagger raised to strike—intending thus to make an end. Before Graziani could move to defend himself, the blade had descended full upon his breast. Encountering there the links of the shirt of mail he wore beneath his quilted doublet—for he had omitted no precautions—it broke off at the hilt under the force that drove it.

Then Graziani seized that wretched wisp of humanity by the breast of his mean jacket and dashed him violently across the room. The mute hurtled into Alviano, who stood midway between the table and one of the windows. Alviano, thrown off his balance by the impact, staggered in his turn and reeled against an ebony pedestal surmounted by a marble Cupid. The Cupid, thus dislodged, went crashing through the casement into the street below.

NOW, this was more than Graziani had intended, but it was certainly no more than he could have desired. The signal to Barbo had been given, and no one present any the wiser. It heartened him. He smiled grimly, whipped out his long sword, swung his cloak upon his left arm and rushed thus upon Ranieri, forced for the moment to leave his back unguarded.

Ranieri, unprepared for the onslaught and startled by its suddenness, swung aside, leaving the captain a clear way. But Graziani was not so mad as to attempt to open the door. He knew well that while he paused to seize and raise the latch, a half-dozen blades would be through his back before the thing could be accomplished. Instead, having reached the door, he swung round and, setting his back to it, faced that murderous company as it swooped down upon him with naked weapons.

Five men confronted him immediately. Behind them stood Sinibaldi, his sword drawn against the need to use it, yet waiting meanwhile, preferring that such work should be done by his underlings.

Yet, though they were five to one, Graziani's sudden turn to face them and his poised preparedness gave them a moment's pause. In that moment he reckoned up his chances. He found them slight but not quite hopeless, since all that was incumbent on him was to ward their blows and gain some moments until Barbo and his men could come to his assistance.

Another instant and they had closed with him, their whirling blades athirst for his life. He made the best defense that a man could make against such an onslaught, and a wonderful defense it was. He was well trained in arms as in all bodily exercises, supple of joint, quick of movement, long of limb and with muscles that were all steel and whip-cord.

For some moments fortune favored him, and his shirt of mail proved his best friend. Indeed, it was not until Alviano's sword-blade was shivered in a powerful lunge that caught Graziani full in the middle of the body that those gentlemen realized that the *condottiero's* head was the only part of him that was vulnerable. It was Sinibaldi who told them so, shouting it fiercely as he shouldered-aside the now disarmed Alviano and stepped into the place from which he thrust him. With death in his eyes, the prince now led the attack upon that man who made so desperate a defense without chance of breaking ground or lessening the number of his assailants.

Suddenly Sinibaldi's blade licked in and out again with lightning swiftness in a feint that culminated in a second thrust, and Graziani felt his sword-arm suddenly benumbed. To realize what had happened and to readjust the matter was with the captain the work of one single thought. He caught his sword in his left hand, that so he might continue his defense, even as Sinibaldi, by a turn of the wrist, made a cutting stroke at his bare head. Perforce Graziani was slow to the parry; the fraction of a second lost in transferring his sword to the left hand and the further circumstance that his left arm was hampered by the cloak he had wound about it left too great an advantage with Sinibaldi. Yet Graziani's blade, though too late to put the other's aside, was yet in time to break the force of the blow as it descended. The edge was deflected, but not enough. If it did not open his skull as was intended, at least it dealt him a long, slanting scalp-wound.

The *condottiero* felt the room rock and heave under his feet. Then he dropped his sword, and, leaning against the wall while his assailants checked to watch him, very gently slithered down it and sat huddled in a heap on the floor, the blood from his wound streaming down over his face. Sinibaldi shortened his sword, intent upon making quite sure of his victim by driving the steel through his windpipe. But even as he was in the act of aiming the stroke, he was suddenly arrested by the horrible, vehement outcry of the mute, who had remained at the broken window, and by a thunder of blows that fell simultaneously upon the door below, accompanied by a sudden call to open.

THAT sound smote terror into the conspirators. It roused them to a sense of what they were doing and brought to their minds the thought of Cesare Borgia's swift and relentless justice which spared no man, patrician or plebeian. And so they stood limply stricken, at gaze, their ears straining to listen, while below the blows upon the door were repeated more vehemently than before.

"We are trapped, betrayed!" Ranieri swore thickly and horribly.

Uproar followed. The eight plotters looked this way and that, as if seeking a way out; each gave counsels and asked questions in a breath, none heeding none, until at last the mute, having compelled their attention by his excited croaks, showed them the road of escape.

He crossed the length of the room at a run and, nimble as a cat, leaped upon a marble table that stood before the casement overlooking the river, from which the house rose almost sheer. He never so much as paused to open it. The acquaintance he had already made with the methods of Borgia justice so quickened his terrors to a frenzy that he hurled himself bodily at the closed window and, shivering it by the force of the impact, went through it and down in a shower of broken glass to the black, icy waters below.

They followed him as sheep follow their bell-wether. One after another they leaped upon the marble table, and thence, through the gap he had made, plunged down into the river. Not one of them had the wit in that breathless moment to pause to consider which way the tide might be running. Had it chanced to have been upon the ebb, it must have swept them out to sea, and none of them would further have troubled the destinies of Italy. Fortunately for them, however, it was flowing in; so it bore them upward toward the Bridge of Augustus, where they were able, unseen, to effect a landing—all save Pietro Corvo, the mute, who was drowned, and Sinibaldi, who remained behind.

Like Graziani, Sinibaldi, too, wore a shirt of mail beneath his doublet, as a precaution proper in one who engaged in such hazardous methods of underground warfare. It was, indeed, an almost inveterate habit with him. Less impetuous than those others, he paused to calculate his chances, and bethought him that it was odds this armor would sink him in the flood. So he stayed to doff it first.

Vainly had he called upon the others to wait for him. Ranieri had answered him standing upon the table, ready for the leap.

"Wait? Body of God! Are you mad? Is this a time to wait?" Yet he delayed to explain the precise and urgent need to depart. "We must run no risk of capture. For now, more than ever, must the thing be done, or we are all dead men—and it must be done to-night, as was planned. Excess of preparation has gone near to undoing us. We could have contrived excellently without that fool"—and he jerked a thumb toward Graziani—"as I told your Excellency. And we shall contrive no less excellently without him as it is. But contrive we must, else, I say again, we are dead men—all of us." And upon that he went through the window and down into the water after the others.

With fingers that haste made clumsy, Sinibaldi tugged at the buttons of his doublet, hampered by having tucked his sword under his arm. But hardly had Ranieri vanished into the night than the door below was flung inward with a crash. There followed a sound of angry voices as the servants of the household was thrust roughly aside, and ringing steps came clattering up the stairs.

Sinibaldi, still tugging at the buttons of his doublet, sprang desperately toward the window, and wondered for a moment whether he should take the risk of drowning. But even as he stood poised for the leap, he remembered suddenly the immunity he derived from the office that was his. After all, as the envoy of Venice he was inviolable—a man upon whom no finger was to be laid by any without provoking the resentment of the republic. He had been overanxious. He had nothing to fear where nothing could be proved against him. Not even Graziani could have said enough to imperil the sacred person of an ambassador, and it was odds that Graziani would never say anything again.

So he sheathed his sword, readjusted his doublet and composed himself. Indeed, he actually went the length of opening the door to the invaders, calling, to guide them:

"This way! This way!"

They swarmed in, all ten of them, the grizzled ancient at their head, so furiously that they bore the prince backward and all but trampled on him.

Barbo checked them in mid-chamber, and looked round bewildered, until his eyes alighted upon his fallen, blood-bedabbled captain huddled at the foot of the wall. At the sight he roared like a bull to express his anger, what time his followers closed about the saturnine Venetian.

With as great dignity as was possible to a man at such a disadvantage, Sinibaldi sought to hold them off.

"You touch me at your peril," he warned them. "I am Prince Marcantonio Sinibaldi, the envoy of Venice."

The ancient swung half round to answer him, snarling:

"Were you Prince Lucifer, envoy of hell, you should still account for what was doing here and how my captain came by his hurt. Make him fast!"

The men-at-arms obeyed with a very ready will, for Graziani was beloved of all that rode with him. It was in vain that the Venetian stormed and threatened, pleaded and protested. They disarmed him, bound his wrists behind him, like any common malefactor's, and thrust him contumeliously from the room, down the stairs and so, without hat or cloak, out into the murky, windswept street.

FOUR of them remained above at the ancient's bidding, while he himself went down upon his kness beside his fallen captain to look to his condition. And at once Graziani began to show signs of life. Indeed, he had shown that he was not dead the moment the door had closed after the departing men.

Supported now by Barbo, he sat up, and with his left hand smeared away some of the blood that almost blinded him, and looked dully at his ancient.

"I am alive, Barbo," he said, though his voice came feebly. "But, body of God, you were no more than in time to find me so! Had you been a minute later, you would have been too late for me—aye; and perhaps for the duke, too." He smiled faintly. "When I found that valor would no longer avail me, I had recourse to craft. It is well to play the fox when you cannot play the lion. With this gash over the head and my face smeared in blood, I pretended to be done for. But I was conscious throughout, and it is a grim thing, Barbo, consciously to take the chance of death without daring to lift a finger to avert it, lest thereby you hasten it on. I—" He gulped, and his head hung down, showing that his strength was ebbing. Then he rallied desperately, almost by sheer force of will. There was something he must say ere everything was blotted out, as he felt it would be soon. "Get you to my lord duke, Barbo. Make haste. Tell him that here was some treason plotting—something that is to be done to-night—that will still be done by those who escaped. Bid him look to himself. Hasten, man! Say I——"

"Their names! Their names!" cried the ancient urgently, seeing his captain on the point of swooning.

Graziani reared his head again and slowly opened his dull eyes. But he did not answer. His lids drooped and his head lolled sideways against his ancient's shoulder. It was as if by an effort of sheer will he had but kept a grip of his senses until he could utter that urgent warning. Then, his duty done, he relinquished that painful hold and allowed himself to slip into the peace and the shadows of unconsciousness, exhausted.

THE great need for urgency, the chief reason why "the thing" must be done that night, as the Lord Ranieri had said before he dived from his window into the river, lay in the circumstance that it was the duke's last night in the city of Rimini. On the morrow he marched with his army upon Faenza and the Manfredi.

It had therefore seemed proper to the councilors and patricians of Rimini to mark their entire submission to his authority by a banquet in his honor at the Palazzo Pubblico. At this banquet were assembled all Riminese that were noble or notable, and a great number of repatriated patricians, the *fuorusciti*, whom, upon one pretext or another, the hated Malatesta tyrant had driven from his dominions that he might enrich himself by the confiscation of their possessions. Jubilantly came they now with their ladies to do homage to the duke who had broken the power and delivered the state from the thraldom of the iniquitous Pandolfaccio, assured that his justice would right the wrongs which they had suffered.

Present, too, were the envoys and ambassadors of several Italian powers sent to felicitate Cesare Borgia upon this latest conquest. But it was in vain that the young duke turned his hazel eyes this way and that in quest of Marcantonio Sinibaldi, the princely envoy extraordinary of the Most Serene Republic. The envoy extraordinary was nowhere to be seen in that courtly gathering, and the duke, who missed nothing and who disliked leaving riddles unsolved—particularly when they concerned a state that was hostile to himself—was vexed to know the reason of this absence.

It was the more remarkable since Prince Sinibaldi's lady, a stately, blond woman, whose stomacher was a flashing cuirass of gems, was seated near Cesare's right hand, between the sober black velvet of the president of the Council and the flaming scarlet of the handsome cardinal-legate, thus filling the position to which she was entitled by her lofty rank and the respect due to the great republic which her husband represented.

Another whose absence the duke might have remarked was, of course, the Lord Ranieri, who had excused himself, indeed, to the president upon a plea of indisposition. But Valentinois was too much concerned with the matter of Sinibaldi's whereabouts. He lounged in his great chair, a long, supple incarnation of youth and vigor, in a tight-fitting doublet of cloth of gold, with jeweled bands at neck and wrists and waist. His pale, beautiful face was thoughtful, and his tapering fingers strayed ever and anon to the tips of his tawny silken beard.

The banquet touched its end, and the floor of the great hall was being cleared by the seneschal to make room for the players, sent from Mantua by the beautiful Marchioness Gonzaga, who were to perform a comedy for the company's delectation.

It was not comedy, however, but tragedy all unsuspected, that impended, and the actor who suddenly strode into that hall to speak its prologue, thrusting rudely aside the lackeys who would have hindered him, misliking his wild looks, was Barbo, the ancient of Graziani's company.

"My lord!" he cried, panting for breath. "My lord Duke!" And his hands fiercely cuffed the grooms who still sought to bar his passage. "Out of my way, oafs! I must speak to his Highness. Out of my way!"

The company had fallen silent, some startled by this intrusion, others conceiving that it might be the opening of the comedy that was prepared. Into that silence cut the duke's voice, crisp and metallic.

"Let him approach!"

Instantly the grooms ceased their resistance, glad enough to do so, for Barbo's hands were heavy and he was prodigal in the use of them. Released, he strode up the hall and came to a standstill, stiff and soldierly before the duke, saluting almost curtly in his eagerness.

"Who are you?" rapped his Highness.

"My name is Barbo," the soldier answered. "I am an ancient in the *condotta* of Messer Angelo Graziani."

"What brings you?"

"Treason, my lord—that is what brings me!" roared the soldier, setting the company all agog.

Cesare alone showed no sign of excitement. His eyes calmly surveyed this messenger, waiting. Thereupon Barbo plunged headlong into the speech he had prepared.

"My captain, Messer Graziani, lies speechless and senseless with a broken head, else were he here in my place, my lord, and perhaps with a fuller tale. I car but tell what little I know, adding the little that himself he told me ere his senses left him.

"By his command we—ten men of his company and myself—watched a certain house into which he went to-night at the first hour, with orders to break in should we receive a certain signal. That signal we received. Acting instantly upon it, we——"

"Wait, man!" the duke cut in. "Let us have this tale in order and in plain words. A certain house, you say? What house was that?"

"The Lord Ranieri's palace, my lord."

A stir of increasing interest rustled through the company, but dominating it, and audible to him, because it came from his neighborhood immediately on his right, the duke caught a gasp, a faint half-cry of one who has been startled into sudden fear. That sound arrested his attention, and he shot a swift, sidelong glance in the direction whence it had come, to discover that the Princess Sinibaldi had sunk back in her chair, her cheeks deadly white, her blue eyes wide with panic. Even as he looked and saw, his swiftly calculating mind had mastered certain facts and had found the probable solution of the riddle that earlier had intrigued him—the riddle of Sinibaldi's absence. He thought that he knew now where the prince had been that evening, though he had yet to learn the nature of this treason of which Barbo spoke, and in which he could not doubt that Sinibaldi was engaged.

Even as this understanding flashed across his mind, the ancient was resuming his interrupted narrative.

"At the signal, then, my lord, we broke into——"

"Wait!" The duke again checked him.

There followed a brief pause, Barbo standing stiffly, waiting for leave to continue, impatient of the restraint imposed upon his eagerness. Cesare's glance, calm and so inscrutable as to appear almost unseeing, had passed from the princess to Messer Paolo Capello, the Venetian orator, seated a little way down the hall on the duke's left. Cesare noted the man's tense attitude, the look of apprehension on his round white face, and beheld in those signs the confirmation of what already he had conjectured.

SO VENICE was engaged in this. Those implacable traders of the Rialto were behind this happening at Ranieri's house, in which one of the duke's captains had received a broken head. And the ordinary envoy of Venice was anxiously waiting to learn what might have befallen the envoy extraordinary, so that he might promptly take his measures.

Cesare knew the craft of the Most Serene and of its ambassadors. He was here on swampy, treacherous ground, and he must pick his way with care. Certainly Messer Capello must not hear what this soldier might have to tell, for then— *præmonitus, præmunitus*. In the orator's uncertainty of what had passed might lie Cesare's strength to deal with Venice.

"We are too public here," he said to Barbo shortly, and on that he rose.

Out of deference, the entire company rose with him—all save one. Sinibaldi's lady, indeed, went so far as to make the effort, but faint as she was with fear, her limbs refused to do their office, and she kept her seat, a circumstance which Cesare did not fail to note. He waved a hand to the banqueters, smiling urbanely.

"Sirs and ladies," he said, "I pray you keep your seats. It is not my desire that you should be disturbed by this." Then he turned to the president of the Council. "If you, sir, will give me leave apart a moment with this fellow——"

"Assuredly, my lord; assuredly!" cried

the president nervously, flung into confusion by this deference from one of the duke's exalted quality. "This way, Magnificent. This closet here— You will be private."

Stammering, fluttering, he had stepped down the hall, the duke following and Barbo clanking after them. The president opened a door, and, drawing aside, he bowed low and waved the duke into a small antechamber. Cesare passed in, with Barbo following. The door closed after them, and a murmur reached them of the babble that broke forth beyond it.

THE room was small but richly furnished, possibly against the chance of its use being desired by his Highness. The middle of its tessellated floor was occupied by a table with massively carved supporting Cupids, near which stood a great chair upholstered in crimson velvet. The room was lit by a cluster of wax candles in a candle-branch richly wrought in the shape of a group of scaling Titans.

Cesare flung himself into the chair and turned to Barbo.

"Now your tale," he said shortly.

Barbo threw wide at last the flood-gates of his eagerness and let his tale flow forth. He related in fullest detail the happenings of that night at Ranieri's palace, repeating faithfully the words that Graziani had uttered, and concluding on the announcement that he had captured at least one of the conspirators—the Prince Marcantonio Sinibaldi.

"I trust that in this I have done well, my lord," the fellow added, with some hesitation. "It seemed no less than Messer Graziani ordered. Yet his Magnificence spoke of being an ambassador of the Most Serene——"

"The devil take the Most Serene and her ambassadors!" flashed Cesare, betrayed into it by his inward seething rage. On the instant he suppressed all show of feeling. "Be content. You have done well," he said.

He rose, turned his back on the ancient and strode to the uncurtained, gleaming windows. There he stood a moment, staring out into the starlit night, fingering his beard, his brow dark with thought. Then he came slowly back, his head bowed, nor did he raise it until he stood again before the ancient.

"You have no hint—no suspicion of the nature of this conspiracy, of what is this thing they were planning and are still to attempt to-night?" he asked.

"None, my lord. I have said all I know."

"Nor who were the men that escaped?"

"Nor that, my lord, save that one of them would no doubt be the Lord Ranieri."

"Ah, but the others—and we do not even know how many there were—" Cesare checked. He had bethought him of the Princess Sinibaldi. This urgently needed information might be wrung from her. That she possessed such knowledge her bearing had proclaimed. He smiled darkly.

"Desire Messer, the president of the Council, to attend me here, together with the Princess Sinibaldi. Then do you wait my orders. And see to it that you say no word of this to any."

Barbo saluted and withdrew upon that errand. Cesare paced slowly back to the window and waited, his brow against the cool pane, his mind busy, until the door reopened and the president ushered in the princess.

The president came avid for news. Disappointment awaited him.

"I but desired you, sir, as an escort for this lady," Cesare informed him. "If you will give us leave together——"

Stifling his regrets and murmuring his acquiescence, the man effaced himself. When they were alone together, Cesare turned to the woman and observed the deathly pallor of her face, the agitated gallop of her bosom. He judged her shrewdly as one whose tongue would soon be loosed by fear.

He bowed to her and, with a smile and the very courtliest and deferential grace, proffered her the great gilt-and-crimson chair. In silence she sank into it limply, and grateful for its support. She dabbed her lips with a gilt-edged handkerchief, her startled eyes never leaving the duke's face, as if their glance were held in fascinated subjection.

Standing by the table at which she now sat, Cesare rested his finger-tips upon the edge of it and leaned across toward her.

"I have sent for you, *madonna,*" he said, his tone very soft and gentle, "to afford you the opportunity of rescuing your husband's neck from the hands of my strangler."

In itself it was a terrifying announcement, and it was rendered the more terrifying by the gentle, emotionless tones in which it was uttered. It did not fail of its calculated effect.

"O God!" gasped the afflicted woman, and clutched her white bosom with both hands. "*Gesù!* I knew it! My heart had told me."

"Do not alarm yourself, *madonna*, I implore you. There is not the cause," he assured her, and no voice could have been more soothing. "The Prince Sinibaldi is below, waiting my pleasure. But I have no pleasure, Princess, that is not your pleasure. Your husband's life is in your own hands. I place it there. He lives or dies as you decree."

She looked up into his beautiful young face, into those hazel eyes that looked too gentle now, and she cowered abjectly, cringing before him. She was left in doubt of the meaning of his ambiguous words and his almost wooing manner. And this, too, he had intended—deliberate in his ambiguity, using it as a flame of fresh terror in which to scorch her will until it should become pliant as heated metal.

He saw the scarlet flush rise slowly up to stain her neck and face, while her eyes remained fixed upon his own.

"My lord," she panted, "I know not what you mean. You—" And then her spirit rallied. He saw her body stiffen and her glance harden and grow defiant. But when she spoke, her voice betrayed her by its quaver.

"Prince Sinibaldi is the accredited envoy of the Most Serene. His person is sacred. A hurt to him were as a hurt to the republic whose representative he is, and the republic is not slow to avenge her hurts. You dare not touch him."

He continued to regard her, smiling.

"That I have done already. Have I not said that he is a prisoner now—below here—bound and waiting my pleasure." And he repeated his phrase. "But my pleasure, *madonna*, shall be your pleasure."

Yet all the answer she could return him was a reiteration of her cry:

"You dare not! You dare not!"

The smile perished slowly from his face. He inclined his head to her, though not without a tinge of mockery.

"I will leave you happy, then, in that conviction," he said on a note at once so sardonic and sinister that it broke her newfound spirit into shards.

As if he accepted the fruitlessness of the interview and accounted it concluded, he turned and stepped to the door. At this her terror, held in check a moment, swept over her again like a flood. She staggered to her feet, one hand on the table to support her, the other at her breast.

"My lord! My lord! A moment! Pity!"

He paused and half-turned, his fingers already upon the latch.

"I will have pity, *madonna*, if you will teach me pity—if you will show me pity." He came back to her slowly, very grave now. "This husband of yours has been taken in treason. If you would not have him strangled this night, if you would ever hold him warm and living in your arms again, it is yours to rescue him from what impends."

He was looking deep and earnestly into her eyes, and she bore the glance, returned it wildly, in silence, for a dozen heart-beats. Then, at last, her lids dropped. She bowed her head.

"What—what do you require of me?" she breathed in a small, fluttering voice.

THERE was never a man more versed then he in the uses of ambiguity.

He had employed it now so as to produce in her the maximum of terror—so as to convey to her a suggestion that he asked the maximum price. Thus, when he made clear his real meaning, there would be reaction from her worst dread, and in that reaction he would trap her. The great sacrifice he demanded would be dwarfed in her view by relief, would seem small by comparison with the sacrifice his ambiguity had led her to fancy he required.

So, when she asked that faint, piteous question: "What do you require of me?" he answered swift and sharply,

"All that is known to you of this conspiracy in which he was taken."

He caught the upward flash of her eyes, their look of amazement, almost of relief, and knew that he had made her malleable. She swayed where she stood. He steadied her with ready hands and gently pressed her back into her chair.

And now he proceeded to hammer the metal he had softened.

"Come, *madonna;* use despatch, I beg," he urged her, his voice level but singularly compelling. "Do not strain a patience that has its roots in mercy. Consider that the information I require of you, and for which I offer you so generous a price, torture can extract for me from this husband of yours. I will be frank with you as at an Easter shrift. It is true I do not wish to embroil myself with the Most Serene Republic and that I seek to gain my ends by gentle measures. But, by the Host, if my gentle measures do not prevail with you, why, then, Prince Sinibaldi shall be squeezed dry upon the rack. My name," he ended almost grimly, "is Cesare Borgia. You know what repute I enjoy in Venice."

She stared at him, considering, confused, and voiced the very question that perplexed her.

"You offer me his life—his life and freedom—in exchange for this information?"

"That is what I offer."

She pressed her hands to her brows, seeking to fathom the mystery of an offer that appeared to hold such extraordinary elements of contradiction.

"But then—" she began tremulously, and paused for lack of words in which to frame her doubts.

"If you need more assurance, *madonna*, you shall have it," he said. "You shall have the assurance of my oath. I swear to you by my honor and my hope of heaven that neither in myself nor through another shall I procure the hurt of so much as a hair of Sinibaldi's head, provided that I know all of the treason that was plotting to be done this night."

That resolved her doubts. She saw the reason of the thing, understood that, after all, he but offered Sinibaldi's life in exchange for his own safety. Yet even then she hesitated, thinking of her husband.

"He may blame me—" she began, faltering.

Cesare's eyes gleamed.

"He need never know," he urged her insidiously.

"You—you pledge your word?" she insisted.

"Already have I pledged it, *madonna*," he answered, and he could not altogether repress a note of bitterness. For he had pledged it reluctantly, because he conceived that no less would satisfy her. It was a bargain he would have avoided had there been a way. For he did not lightly forgive, and he did not relish the notion of Sinibaldi's going unpunished. But he had perceived that unless he gave this undertaking he would be without the means to parry the blow that might be struck at any moment.

"You mean that you will not even allow him to know that you know—that you will but use the information I may give you to procure your own safety?"

"That is what I mean," he assured her, and waited, confident now that he was about to have the thing he desired and for which he had bidden something recklessly.

AND at last he got the story—the sum total of her knowledge. Last night Ranieri and Prince Sinibaldi had sat late alone together. Her suspicions had earlier been roused that her husband was plotting something with this friend of the fallen Malatesta. Driven by these suspicions, jealous, perhaps, to find herself excluded from her husband's confidence in this matter, she had played the eavesdropper.

"The Lord Ranieri," she said, "spoke of this banquet at the Palazzo Pubblico, urging that the opportunity it afforded would be a rare one. It was Ranieri, my lord, who was the villain, the tempter in this affair."

"Yes, yes; no doubt," said Cesare impatiently. "It matters not which was the tempter, which the tempted. The story of it!"

"Ranieri knew that you would be returning to sleep at Sigismondo's castle, and that it was planned to escort you thither in procession by torchlight. At some point on your way—but where I cannot tell you, for this much I did not learn—at some point on your way, then, Ranieri spoke of two crossbow-men that were to be ambushed to shoot you."

She paused a moment. But Cesare offered no comment, betrayed no faintest perturbation. So she proceeded:

"But there was a difficulty. Ranieri did not account it insuperable, but to make doubly sure he desired it should be removed. He feared that if mounted guards chanced to ride beside you, it might not be easy for the crossbow-men to shoot past them. Foot-guards would not signify, as the men could shoot over their heads. But it was necessary, he held, to make quite sure that none but foot-guards should be immediately about your person, so that, riding clear above them, you should offer a fair mark.

To make sure of this, it was that he proposed to seduce one of your captains—I think it would be this man Graziani, whom the soldier told you had been wounded. Ranieri was satisfied that Graziani was disaffected toward your Highness, and that he might easily be bought to lend a hand in their enterprise."

Valentinois smiled slowly, thoughtfully. He knew quite well the source of Ranieri's rash assumption. Then, as he considered further, that smile of his grew faintly cruel.

"That is all I overheard, my lord," she added, after an instant's pause.

He stirred at that, threw back his head and laughed shortly.

"Enough, as God lives!" he snorted.

She looked at him, and the sight of his countenance and the blaze of his tawny eye filled her with fresh terror. She started to her feet and appealed to him to remember his oath. At that appeal he put aside all trace of wrath and smiled again.

"Let your fears have rest," he bade her. "I have sworn, and by what I have sworn I shall abide. Nor I nor man of mine shall do hurt to Prince Sinibaldi."

She wanted to pour out her gratitude and her deep sense of his magnanimity. But words failed her for a moment, and ere she had found them, he was urging her to depart.

"*Madonna*, you were best away, I think. You are overwrought. I fear that I have tried you sorely."

She confessed to her condition, and professed that she would be glad of his leave to return home at once.

"The prince shall follow you," he promised her, as he conducted her to the door. "First, however, we shall endeavor to make our peace with him, and I do not doubt but that we shall succeed. Be content," he added, observing the fresh panic that stared at him from her blue eyes—for she suddenly bethought her of what manner of peace it was Cesare's wont to make with his enemies. "He shall be treated by me with all honor. I shall endeavor by friendliness to win him from these traitors who had seduced him."

"It is so! It is so!" she exclaimed, seizing with avidity upon that excuse which he so generously implied for the man who would have contrived his murder. "It was none of his devising. He was lured to it by the evil counsels of others."

"How can I doubt it, since you assure me of it?" he replied, with an irony so subtle that it escaped her. He bowed and opened the door.

FOLLOWING her out into the great hall, where instantly silence fell and a hundred eyes became leveled upon them, he beckoned the president of the Council, who hovered near, awaiting him. Into the president's care he surrendered the princess, desiring him to conduct her to her litter.

Again he bowed to her, profoundly in farewell, and as she passed out of the hall, her hand upon the arm of the president, he stepped up to his place at the board again, and, with a light jest and a laugh, invited the return of mirth, as if no thought or care troubled his mind.

He saw that Capello watched him with saucer-eyes, and he could imagine the misgivings that filled the Venetian orator's heart as a result of that long interview which had ended in the withdrawal of Sinibaldi's lady from the feast. Messer Capello should be abundantly entertained, he thought, with grim humor, and when the president had returned from escorting the princess to her litter, Cesare raised a finger and signed to the steel-clad ancient, who stood waiting as he had been bidden.

Barbo clanked forward.

"Bring in the Prince Sinibaldi!" Cesare commanded, and therewith he fetched consternation back into that hall.

The portly, slimy Capello was so wrought upon by his perturbation at this command that he heaved himself to his feet and made so bold as to go round to Cesare's chair.

"Magnificent," he muttered fearfully, "what is this of Prince Sinibaldi?"

The duke flung at him a glance contemptuously over his shoulder.

"Wait, and you will see," he said.

"But, my lord, I implore you to consider that the Most Serene——"

"A little patience, sir!" snapped Cesare, and the glance of his eyes drove back the flabby ambassador like a blow. He hung there behind the duke's chair, very white, and breathing laboredly. His fleshiness troubled him at such times as these.

The double doors were flung open and Barbo reentered. He was followed by four men-at-arms of Graziani's *condotta*, and in their midst walked Prince Sinibaldi, the envoy extraordinary of the Most Serene

Republic. But his air and condition were rather those of a common malefactor. His wrists were still pinioned behind his back; he was without hat or cloak; his clothes were in some disarray, as a result of his struggles, and his mien was sullen.

The company's amazement deepened, and a murmur ran round the board.

AT A sign from the duke the guards fell back a little from their prisoner, leaving him face to face with Cesare.

"Untie his wrists!" the duke commanded, and Barbo instantly slashed through the prince's bonds.

Conscious of the eyes upon him, the Venetian rallied his drooping spirits. He flung back his head, drew himself up—a tall figure, full now of dignity and scorn, his eyes set boldly upon Cesare's impassive face, and broke into a torrent of angry speech.

"Is it by your commands, my lord Duke, that these indignities are put upon the inviolable person of an envoy?" he demanded. "The Most Serene, whose mouthpiece I have the honor to be, whose representative I am, is not likely to suffer with patience such dishonor."

Within the duke's reach stood an orange that had been injected with rose attar to be used as a perfume-ball. He took it up in his long fingers and delicately sniffed it.

"I trust," said he in that quiet voice which he could render so penetrating and so sweetly sinister, "that I apprehend you amiss when I apprehend that you threaten. It is not wise to threaten us, Excellency—not even for an envoy of the Most Serene." And he smiled upon the Venetian, but with such a smile that Sinibaldi quailed and lost on the instant much of his fine arrogance.

Capello, in the background, wrung his hands and with difficulty suppressed a groan.

"I do not threaten, my lord—" began Sinibaldi.

"I am relieved to hear it," said the duke.

"I protest," Sinibaldi concluded. "I protest against the treatment I have received."

"Ah!" said the duke, and again he sniffed his orange. "Your protest shall have all attention. Never suppose me capable of overlooking anything that is your due. Continue, then, I beg. Let us hear, my lord, your version of the night's affair. Condescend to explain the error of which you are the victim, and I promise you the blunderers will be punished. Continue, pray."

Sinibaldi did not continue. Instead, he began at the beginning of the tale he had prepared during the ample leisure that had been accorded him for the task. And it was a crafty tale, most cunningly conceived, and based, as all convincing tales should be, upon actualities. It was, in fact, precisely such a tale as Graziani might have told had he been there to speak, and being therefore true—though not true of Sinibaldi—would bear testing and should carry conviction.

"I was bidden, Magnificent, in secret tonight to a meeting held at the house of my lord Ranieri, whose guest it happens that I have been since my coming to Rimini. I went urged by the promise that a matter of life and death was to be dealt with which concerned me closely.

"I found a small company assembled there, but before they would reveal to me the real purpose of that gathering, they desired me to make an irrevocable oath that whether or not I became a party to the matters that were to be disclosed to me, I would never divulge a single word of it or the name of any of those whom I met there. Now, I am not a fool, Magnificent——"

"Who implies it?" wondered Cesare aloud.

"I am not a fool, and I scented treason instantly, as they knew I must. It is to be assumed that by some misconception they had come to think that I had ends to serve by listening to treason, by becoming a party to it. Therein lay their mistake—a mistake that was near to costing me my life, and has occasioned me this indignity of which I complain. I will not trouble your Magnificence with my personal feelings. They matter nothing. I am an envoy, and just as I know and expect what is due to me, so do I know and fulfil what is due from me. These fools should have considered that more fully. Since they did not——"

"God give us patience!" broke in the duke. "Will you go over that again? This is mere oratory, sir. Your tale, sir—your tale! Let the facts plead for you."

Sinibaldi inclined his head with dignity.

"Indeed, your Highness is right—as ever. To my tale, then. Where was I? Ah, yes—when an oath of that nature was demanded of me, I would at once have drawn back. But I perceived that already I had gone too far in thoughtlessly joining that assembly and that they would never suffer me to depart again and spread the alarm of what was doing there. They dared not for their lives' sake. So much was clear. Therefore, for my own life's sake and in self-defense, I took the oath imposed. But having taken it, I announced plainly that I desired to hear no more of any plot. I warned them that they were rash in having set their hands to any secret business, and that if—as I conceived—it had for aim your Highness's hurt, then they were more than rash, since your Magnificence has as many eyes as Argus. Upon that I begged them to suffer me to depart, since I was sworn to silence.

"But men of their sort are easily fearful of betrayal and do not lay much store by oaths. They refused to consent to my departure, protesting that I was bent upon denouncing them. From words we passed soon enough to blows. They set upon me, and a fight ensued in which one of them fell to my sword. Then the noise of our brawling brought in a patrol—but for which it is odds I should have left my life there. When these soldiers broke in, the plotters flung themselves from a window into the river, while I remained, having naught to fear since I was innocent of all evil. It was thus that I alone came to be taken by these fellows."

From behind the duke's chair came a deep sigh of relief uttered by the quaking Capello. He advanced a step.

"You see, my lord, you see—" he was beginning.

"Peace, man!" the duke bade him sharply. "Be assured I see as far as any man, and need not borrow your eyes to help me, Ser Capello." Then, turning again to Sinibaldi, and speaking very courteously, "My lord," he said, "it grieves me you should have been mishandled by my soldiery. But I trust to your generosity to see that, until we had this explanation, the appearances were against you, and you will acquit us, I am sure, of any discourtesy to the Most Serene. Let me add, even, that in the case of any one less accredited than yourself or representing a power upon whose friendship I did not so implicitly depend as I do upon that of Venice"—he said it with all the appearance of sincerity and with no slightest trace of irony—"I might be less ready to accept that explanation, and I might press for the names of the men who, you are satisfied, were engaged in treason."

"Those names, Magnificent, already I should have afforded you but for the oath that binds me," answered Sinibaldi.

"That, too, I understand; and so, my lord, out of deference and to mark my esteem of you and of the republic you represent, I do not ask a question you might have a difficulty in answering. Let us forget this unhappy incident."

But at that the ancient, who loved Graziani as faithful hound its master, was unable longer to contain himself. Was the duke mad to accept so preposterous a tale?

"My lord," he broke in, "if what he says is true——"

"If?" cried Cesare. "Who dares to doubt it? Is he not Prince Sinibaldi and the envoy of the Most Serene? Who will cast a doubt upon his word?"

"I will, my lord!"

"By the Host! Now, here's audacity!"

"My lord, if what he says is true, then it follows that Messer Graziani was a traitor—for it was Messer Graziani who was wounded in that brawl, and he would have us believe that the man he wounded was one of those that plotted with his innocence."

"That, quite clearly, is what he has said," Cesare replied.

"Why, then," said Barbo, and he plucked the rude buffalo gauntlet from his left hand, "I say that who says that is a liar, whether he be a prince of Venice or a prince of hell." And he raised the glove he had plucked from his hand, clearly intending to fling it in Sinibaldi's face. But the duke's voice checked the intention. .

"Hold!" it bade him sharply, and instantly he paused. The duke looked at him with narrowing eyes. "You all but did a thing that might have cost you very dear," he said. "Get out of my sight, and take your men with you. But hold yourself at my commands outside. We will talk of this again, perhaps to-night, perhaps to-morrow, Messer Barbo. Go!"

Chilled by tone and glance, Barbo stiffened, saluted, then, with a malignant scowl at Sinibaldi, clanked down the hall and out, counting himself as good as hanged, yet more concerned with the foul slander uttered against his captain than with any fate that might lie in store for himself.

Cesare looked at Sinibaldi and smiled.

"Forgive the lout," he said. "Honesty, and fidelity to his captain prompted him. To-morrow he shall be taught his manners. Meanwhile, of your graciousness forget it with the rest. A place for the Prince Sinibaldi here at my side. Come, my lord; let me play host to you and make you some amends for the rude handling you have suffered. Never blame the master for the stupidity of his lackeys. The Council, whose guest I am, has spread a noble entertainment. Here is a wine that is a very unguent for wounded souls—a whole Tuscan summer has been imprisoned in every flagon of it. And there is to be a comedy—delayed too long by these untoward happenings. Sir President, what of these players sent from Mantua? The Prince Sinibaldi is to be amused, that he may forget how he has been vexed."

You see Prince Sinibaldi, then, limp with amazement, shaken by relief from his long tension, hardly believing himself out of his terrible position, wondering whether perhaps all this were not a dream. He sank into the chair that was placed for him at the duke's side; he drank of the wine that, at the duke's bidding, was poured for him by one of the scarlet lackeys. And then, even as he drank, he almost choked upon the sudden fresh fear that assailed him with the memory of certain stories of Capello's concerning Cesare's craft in the uses of poisons.

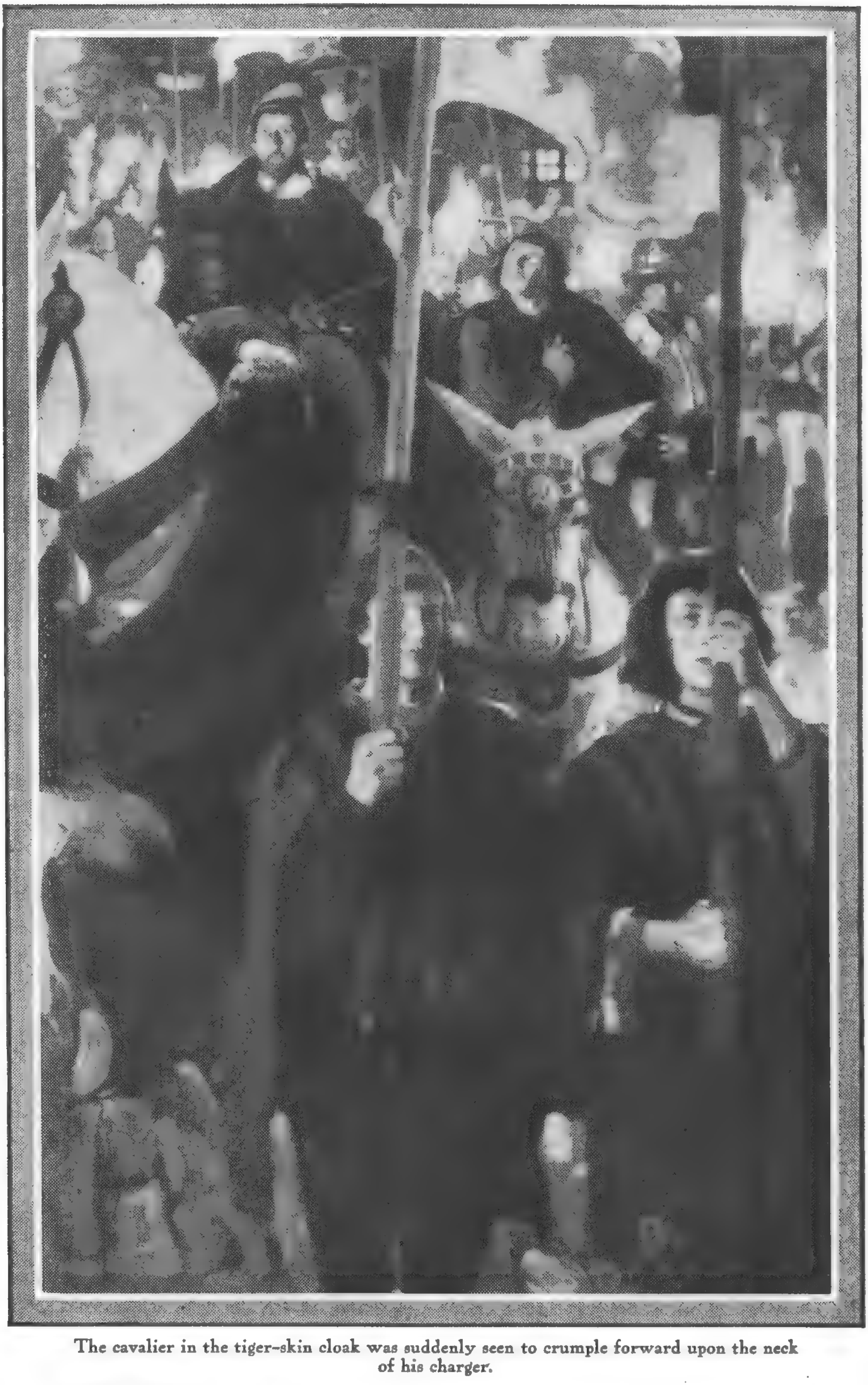
But even as in haste he set down his cup and half turned, he beheld the lackey pouring wine from the same beaker for the venom-taster, who stood behind the duke's chair, and so he was reassured.

THE players followed, and soon the company's attention was engrossed entirely by the plot of the more or less lewd comedy they performed. But Sinibaldi's thoughts were anywhere but with the play. He was considering all that had happened, and most of all his present condition and the honor done him by the duke as a measure of amends for the indignities he had endured. He was a man of sanguine temperament, and gradually his mistrust was dissipated by the increasing conviction that the duke behaved thus toward him out of dread of the powerful republic whose representative he was. Hence was he gradually heartened to the extent of conceiving a certain measure of contempt for the Valentinois of such terrible repute, and a certain assurance, even, that Ranieri and the others would yet carry out the business that had been concerted.

And meanwhile Cesare, beside him, sitting hunched in his chair, his chin in his hand, his eyes intent upon the players, was conscious of as little of the comedy as was Sinibaldi. Had the company been less engrossed, its members might have observed how set remained the duke's countenance, and how vacant. Like Sinibaldi, he, too, was concerned, to the exclusion of all else, with the thing that was to be done that night. He was wondering, too, how far the Most Serene itself might have a hand in this murderous affair, how far Sinibaldi might be an agent sent to do this assassin's work. He bethought him of how at every step in his career and in every way within her power Venice had betrayed her implacable hostility; he remembered how she had gone to work with the insidious weapons of intrigue and slander to embroil him now with France, now with Spain, and how by arms and money she had secretly reenforced his enemies against him.

Was Sinibaldi, then, but the hand of the republic in this matter? Plainly it must be so, since Sinibaldi personally could have no cause to seek his life. Sinibaldi, then, had all the resources of the republic behind him. He was a tool that must be broken, both because he had lent himself to this infamous treachery and because in breaking him would lie Cesare's best answer to the Venetian trader-princes.

Yet, although he saw plainly what was to do, the means of doing it were none so plain. He must pick his way carefully through this tangle, lest it should enmesh him and bring him down. Firstly, he had pledged his princely word that he would do no hurt to Sinibaldi. If possible, he would observe the letter of that promise; as for the spirit of it, it were surely unreasonable to expect him to respect that also. Secondly, to destroy Sinibaldi without destroying with him his confederates were to leave the treachery not only alive but quickened into activity by the spur of revenge. In such a case his own danger would persist, and if the arbalest-bolt were not loosed at him



The cavalier in the tiger-skin cloak was suddenly seen to crumple forward upon the neck of his charger.

to-night, it might come to-morrow or the next day. Thirdly, in dealing with this pack of Venetian murderers he must so go to work as to leave Venice no case for grievance at the result.

So far as Sinibaldi himself was concerned, it must be remembered that the tale he had told so publicly and circumstantially was impossible of refutation save by Graziani—and Graziani was insensible and might not live to refute it, while, even if he did, it would be but the word of Graziani, a captain of fortune—one of a class never deemed overscrupulous—against the word of Sinibaldi, a patrician and a prince of Venice.

There you have the nice problem by which Cesare found himself confronted and which he considered while, with unseeing eyes, he watched the antics of the players.

Light came to him toward the comedy's conclusion. The grim mask of concentration that he had worn was suddenly relaxed, and for a moment his eyes sparkled with almost wicked humor. He flung himself back in his chair and listened now to the epilogue spoken by the leader of the company. At its close he led the applause by detaching from his girdle a heavy purse and flinging it down to the players. Then he turned to Sinibaldi to discuss with him a comedy of which neither had much knowledge. He laughed and jested with the Venetian as with an equal, overwhelming him by the courtly charm in which no man of his day could surpass the duke.

CAME midnight at last—the hour at which it had been arranged that the torchlight procession should set out from the Palazzo Pubblico to escort the duke back to the famous *rocca* of Sigismondo Malatesta, where he was housed. Valentinois gave the signal for departure by rising, and instantly a regiment of grooms and pages hung about him in attendance.

Sinibaldi, facing him, bowed low to take his leave, to go seek his lady whose withdrawal from the banquet had been occasioned, as he had been informed, by his own adventure. But Cesare would not hear of parting from him yet a while. He thanked heaven in his most gracious manner for the new friend it had that night vouchsafed him.

"But for this mischance of yours, Excellency, we might never have come to such desirable knowledge of each other. Forgive me, therefore, if I cannot altogether deplore it."

Overwhelmed by so much honor, Sinibaldi could but bow again, in such humility that you might almost hear him murmuring, "*Domine, non sum dignus*," almost fancy him beating his secretly armored breast in self-abasement. And, meanwhile, the oily Capello, hovering ever nigh, like some tutelary deity, purred and smirked and rubbed his gross white hands that anon should pen more obscenities in defamation of this gracious Valentinois.

"Come, then, Excellency," the duke continued; "you shall ride with me to the citadel, and there pledge our next meeting, which, may the gods please, shall be soon. And Messer Capello, here, shall be of the party. I take no denial. I shall account your refusal as the expression of a lingering resentment at what has befallen you through no fault of my own and to my deep mortification. Come, Prince; they are waiting for us. Messer Capello, follow us."

On the word he thrust an arm, lithe and supple as a thing of steel, through that of Sinibaldi, and in this fashion the twain stepped down the hall together and along the gallery between the files of courtiers gathered there to acclaim the duke. It almost seemed as if Cesare desired that Sinibaldi should share this honor with him, and Capello, following immediately upon their heels, puffed himself out with pride and satisfaction to see Valentinois doing homage to the Most Serene Republic in so marked a manner through her envoy extraordinary.

Thus they came out upon the courtyard into the ruddy glare of a hundred flaming torches that turned to orange the yellowing old walls of the *palazzo*. Here was great press and bustle of grooms about the cavaliers, who were getting to horse, and still more about the ladies, who were climbing to their litters.

It was here that Cesare and Sinibaldi were met by a pair of the duke's vermilion pages, bearing his cloak and cap.

Now, it happened that the cloak, which was fashioned from the skin of a tiger, heavily laced with gold and reversed with yellow satin, was as conspicuous as it was rare and costly. It was a present that the Sultan Bajazet had sent the Borgia out of Turkey, and Cesare had affected it since the cold weather had set in, not only out of his inherent love of splendor but also for the sake of the great warmth which it afforded.

As the stripling stood before him, now presenting that very gorgeous mantle, the duke swung suddenly upon Sinibaldi, standing at his elbow.

"You have no cloak, my lord!" he cried. "No cloak, and it is a bitter night."

"A groom shall find me one, Magnificent," the Venetian answered, and half turned aside to desire Capello to give the order for him.

"Ah, wait!" said Cesare. He took the lovely tiger-skin from the hands of his page. "Since not only in these my new dominions but actually out of loyalty to myself it was that you lost your cloak, suffer me to replace it with this, and at the same time to offer you an all unworthy token of the esteem in which I hold your Excellency and the Serene Republic which you represent."

Sinibaldi fell back a single step, and one of the pages told afterward that on his face was stamped the look of one in sudden fear. He looked deep into the duke's smiling eyes, and perhaps he saw there some faint trace of the mockery which he had fancied that he detected in his smooth words.

Now, Sinibaldi, as you will have seen by the promptitude and thoroughness with which he adapted to himself the story of Graziani's misadventure, was a crafty, subtle-witted gentleman, quick to draw inferences where once a clue was afforded him.

As he met now that so faintly significant smile of Cesare's, as he pondered the faintly significant tone in which the duke had spoken, and as he considered the noble gift that was being proffered him, understanding came to him swift, sudden, and startling as a flash of lightning in the night.

The duke had never been deceived by his specious story; the duke knew the truth; the duke's almost fawning friendliness—which he, like a fool, had for a while fancied to be due to the duke's fear of Venice—had been so much make-believe, so much mockery, the play of cat with mouse.

ALL this he understood now, and saw that he was trapped—and trapped, moreover, with a cunning and a subtlety that made it impossible for him so much as to utter a single word to defend his life. For what could he say? How, short of an open avowal which would be equally destructive to himself, short of declaring that the wearing of that cloak would place him in mortal peril, could he decline the proffered honor?

It came to him in his despair to refuse the gift peremptorily. But, then, gifts from princes such as the Duke of Valentinois and Romagna are not refused by ambassadors extraordinary without putting an affront upon the donor, and that not only in their own personal quality but also, in a sense, on behalf of the state they represent.

Whichever way he turned there was no outlet. And the duke, smiling ever, stood before him, holding out the cloak which to Sinibaldi was as the very mantle of death.

And as if this had not been enough, the ineffable Capello must shuffle forward, smirking and rubbing his hands in satisfaction at this supremely gratifying subjection of the duke to a proper respect for the Most Serene Republic.

"A noble gift, Highness," he purred. "A noble gift, worthy of your Potency's munificence." Then, with a shaft of malice, he added that the duke might know how fully his ulterior motives were perceived and no doubt despised. "And the honor to Prince Sinibaldi will be held by the Most Serene as an honor to herself."

"It is my desire to honor both in the exact measure of their due," laughed Cesare, and Sinibaldi alone, his senses rendered superacute by fear, caught the faintly sinister note in that laugh, read the sinister meaning of those amiable words.

He trembled in the heart of him, cursing Capello for a fool. Then, since he must submit, he took heart of grace. He found courage in hope. He bethought him that after all that had happened that night it would be more than likely that the conspirators would hold their hands at present, that they would postpone to a more opportune season the thing that was to be done. If so, then all would be well, and Cesare would be confounded yet.

Upon that hope he fastened tenaciously, desperately. He assured himself that he had gone too fast in his conclusions. After all, Cesare could have no positive knowledge; with positive knowledge, the duke would unhesitatingly have proceeded to more definite measures. It was impossible that he should harbor more than suspicions, and all his present intent would be to put those suspicions to the test. If, as Sinibaldi now hoped, Ranieri and his friends held their hands that night, Cesare must conclude that those suspicions had been unfounded.

With such reasonings did the Prince Sinibaldi hearten himself, knowing little of Borgia ways and nothing of Cesare's sworn promise to the princess. He recovered quickly his assurance. Indeed, his vacillation had been but momentary. Meeting dissimulation with dissimulation, he murmured some graceful words of deep gratification, submitted to have the cloak thrust upon him, and even the velvet cap with its bordure of miniver that was also Cesare's own, and which was pressed upon him on the same pretext that had served for the cloak.

Thereafter he allowed himself to drift with the tide of things, like a swimmer who, realizing that the current is too strong for him, ceases to torture himself by the effort of stemming it, and abandons himself, hoping that in its course that current will bring him safe to shore. In this spirit he mounted the splendid Barbary charger with its sweeping velvet trappings, which also was Cesare's own, and which became now a further token of his princely munificence.

Yet that fool, Capello, looking on, perceived nothing but what was put before his eyes. He licked his faintly sneering lips over his further proof of Cesare's servility to the republic, and began in his mind to shape the phrases in which he would rejoice the hearts of the Ten.

The prince was mounted, and by his stirrup stood the duke like an equerry. He looked up at the Venetian.

"That is a lively horse, my lord," he said at parting; "a fiery and impulsive child of the desert. But I will bid my footmen hang close upon your flanks, so that they will be at hand in case it should grow restive."

And again Sinibaldi understood the true meaning of those solicitous words, and conceived that he was meant to realize how futile it would be in him to attempt to escape the test to which he was to be submitted.

He bowed his acknowledgment of the warning and the provision, and the duke stepped back, took a plain black cloak and a black hat from a page who had fetched them in answer to his bidding, and mounted a very simply equipped horse which a groom surrendered to him.

Thus, that splendid company rode out into the streets of the town, which were still thronged, for the people of Rimini had waited for the spectacle of this torchlight procession that was to escort the duke's potency back to the *rocca* of Sigismondo. To gratify the people, the cavalcade went forward at a walking-pace, flanked on either side by a file of footmen, bearing torches.

Acclamations greeted them, ringing and sincere, for the conquest of Rimini by Cesare Borgia held for the people the promise of liberation from the cruel yoke under which the tyrant, Pandolfaccio Malatesta, had oppressed them. They knew the wisdom and liberality of his rule elsewhere, and they hailed him now as their deliverer.

"*Duca! Duca!* Valentino!" rang the cry, and Sinibaldi was perhaps the only one in the cavalcade who remarked that the cry rose in a measure as he himself came into view, that it was at himself—travestied in Cesare's barbaric splendor—that the people looked as they shouted and waved their caps. And so it was, for there were few indeed in those lines of sightseers who perceived that the tall man in the tiger-skin mantle and scarlet-and-miniver bonnet riding that sumptuously caparisoned horse—the most splendid figure in all that splendid cavalcade—was not the Duke of Valentinois whom they acclaimed; fewer still were there to pay much heed to the man in the black cloak and heavy hat who came next, a few paces behind, riding beside the orator of Venice, who bestrode a white mule.

Thus the procession made its way across the wide square of the Palazzo Pubblico, and down a narrow street into the main way that runs east and west almost straight across the city from the Bridge of Augustus to the Porta Romana.

AT THE corner of the Via della Rocca, such was the clamor of the sightseers that none heard the twice-repeated twang of an arbalest-cord. Indeed, the first intimation the duke received that the thing he expected had come to pass was when the cavalier in the tiger-skin cloak was suddenly seen to crumple forward upon the neck of his charger.

Instantly the grooms sprang to seize the bridle and support the limp figure of its rider. Those following Cesare—Capello foremost among them—reined in upon the instant; and a sudden awestricken silence fell upon the assembled crowd when, notwithstanding the efforts of the grooms, the man whom they imagined to be Cesare Borgia rolled sideways from the saddle into the arms of those below, an arbalest-bolt through his brain.

That moment of silent panic was succeeded by an awful cry—a wail which in itself expressed the public fear of the awful vengeance that might follow upon the city: "The duke is dead!"

And then, in answer to that cry, by some unaccountable magic—as it seemed to the people—there in his stirrups stood the duke himself, his head bare, his tawny hair glowing ruddily in the torchlight, his brazen voice dominating the din and confusion.

"It is murder!" he proclaimed, and added fiercely the question: "Who has done this foul deed?" Then he flung an arm toward the corner house on his right. "In there!" he shouted to his halberdiers, who came thrusting toward him through the crowd. "In, I say, and on your lives see that not a man escapes you! It is the envoy of Venice whom they have murdered, and they shall pay for it with their necks, whoever they may be!"

IN A moment the house was surrounded by Cesare's men-at-arms. The door crashed inward under the fierce blows of halberds, and the soldiers went in to take the assassins, while Cesare pushed on toward the open square before the citadel, all pouring after him, courtiers, grooms and people, in a vociferous disorder.

Before the citadel Cesare drew rein, and his halberdiers cleared a space, and, with their long pikes held horizontally, formed a barrier against the surging human tide. Other men-at-arms, coming presently down the street, clove through the press, flinging the mob in waves on either side of them. In their midst these pikemen brought five prisoners taken in that house from which death had been launched upon Prince Sinibaldi.

The captives were dragged forward, amid the furious execrations of the people, into that open space which the halberdiers had cleared, and so brought before the duke, who stood there waiting to deal out summary justice. Beside him on his mule, bewildered, pale and flabby, was Messer Capello, retained by Cesare, since, as the only remaining representative of Venice, it concerned him to witness this matter to its end.

He was a dull fellow, this orator, and it is to be doubted whether he had any explanation of the truth until he had looked into the faces of those five wretches whom the men-at-arms now thrust forward into the duke's awful presence. It was now, at last, I think, that he understood that Sinibaldi had been mistaken for the duke and had received in his treacherous brain the bolt intended for Valentinois. Swift upon that realization followed an obvious suspicion. Had the duke so intended it? Had Cesare Borgia deliberately planned that there should be this mistake? Was it to this end that he had arrayed Sinibaldi in the tiger-skin cloak and ducal cap and set him to ride upon his own charger?

Conviction settled upon Messer Capello—conviction and rage at the manner in which the duke had fooled them and turned the tables upon Sinibaldi. But there was yet the Most Serene to be reckoned with, and the Most Serene would know how to avenge the death of her envoy. Heavy indeed should be the reckoning the republic would present.

In his rage, Messer Capello swung round, threats already on his lips, his arm flung out to give them emphasis. But ere he could speak, Cesare had caught by the wrist that outflung arm of his.

"Look!" he bade the envoy. "Look, Messer Capello! Look at those prisoners! There is my Lord Ranieri, who was the prince's host and announced himself his friend—Ranieri, of all men, to have done so foul a thing! And those other two—both of them professed friends of Sinibaldi's, too."

Capello looked as he was bidden, an incipient bewilderment thrusting aside his sudden anger.

"And consider me yet those other two," the duke persisted, his voice swelling with passion. "Both of them in the prince's own livery—his own familiars, his own servants, whom no doubt he trusted. Belike their treachery has been bought by these others, these patrician assassins. To what black depths of villainy can man descend!"

Capello stared at the duke, almost beginning to believe him sincere, so fervidly had he spoken. But, dull fellow though he was, he was not so dull as to be hoodwinked now, nor did the duke intend it. Cesare desired him to know the truth, yet to know it unuttered.

The orator saw clear at last. And, seeing clear, he no longer dared to speak the words that had been on his lips, lest by implication they should convict the dead Sinibaldi, and so bring Capello himself under the wrath of the Ten of Venice. He saw it crystal-clear that to proclaim that Sinibaldi had been slain in Cesare's place were to proclaim that it was Sinibaldi—and so, presumably, the Most Serene itself—that had planned the murder, since all those taken were Sinibaldi's friends and servants.

Capello, looking into the duke's eyes, understood at last that the duke mocked him. He writhed in a boiling wrath that he must for his own sake repress. But that was not all. He was forced to drain to its very dregs the poisonous cup that Cesare had thrust upon him. He was forced to play the dupe, to pretend that he saw in this affair no more than Cesare intended that the world at large should see, to pretend to agree that Sinibaldi had been basely murdered by his friends and servants, and to leave it there.

Swallowing as best he could his rage, he hung his head.

"My lord," he cried, so that all might hear him, "I appeal to you for justice against these murderers in the name of Venice!"

Thus, through the lips of her ambassador, Venice herself was forced to disown these friends of hers—Ranieri and his fellows—and demand their death at the hands of the man whom she had hired them to slay. The tragic irony of it stabbed the orator through and through; the rage begotten of it almost suffocated him, and was ever afterward with him all his life to inform his pen when he wrote aught that concerned the House of Borgia.

And Cesare, appreciating the irony no less, smiled terribly into the eyes of the ineffable Capello as he made answer:

"Trust me to avenge this offense against the Most Serene as fully as though it were an offense against myself."

My Lord Ranieri thereupon shook himself out of the stupor that had numbed his wits when he found Capello deserting and disowning him.

"Magnificent," he cried, straining forward in the hands that held him, his face distorted with rage at Capello and Venice, whose abandoned cat's-paw he now conceived himself, "there is more in this that you do not know! Hear me! Hear me first!"

Cesare advanced his horse a pace or two, so that he was directly over the Lord Ranieri. Leaning slightly from his saddle, he looked into the patrician's eyes.

"There is no need to hear you," he said. "You can tell me nothing that I do not know. Go get you shriven. I will send the hangman for you at dawn."

He wheeled about, summoned his cavaliers and ladies, his grooms and his guards, and so rode ahead of that procession over the drawbridge into the great citadel of Sigismondo.

THE first citizens about the streets of Rimini upon the morrow beheld in the pale wintry light of that November second—appropriately the day of the Dead—five bodies dangling limply from the balcony of the house whence the bolts had been shot—the justice of the Duke of Valentinois upon the murderers of Prince Sinibaldi.

Cesare Borgia himself paused to survey those bodies a little later when he passed by with his armed multitudes, quitting Rimini in all the panoply of war to march against the Manfredi of Faenza. The subtlety of his vengeance pleased him. It was lightened by a vein of grim humor that he savored with relish, thinking of the consternation and discomfiture of the Ten when they should come to hear of it, as hear of it they would in detail from their orator.

But the cream of the jest was yet to come. It followed a week later at Forli, where the duke had paused to assemble his *condotte* for the investment of Faenza.

Thither came Capello, seeking audience on behalf of the Council of Ten. He was the bearer of a letter in which the Most Serene Republic expressed to the duke's magnificence her thanks for the summary justice he had measured out to the murderers of their beloved Prince Sinibaldi.

That pleased Valentinois, and it pleased him no less to reflect that he had faithfully kept the letter of his promise to Sinibaldi's lady, and that neither he nor any man of his had so much as laid a finger upon Sinibaldi to avenge the latter's plotting against himself. There was humor in that, too.

The Spirit of Peter Birch

Is Freedom a Condition or Merely a Habit? Here Is the Story of a Man Who, Spiritually Enslaved for Thirty Years, Suddenly Found Himself Released

By Garret Smith

OLD Peter Birch raised his battered frame upright in bed with a momentary burst of rage—given energy belying his wounds and his years. He fixed his unperturbed elderly valet with one fierce gray eye, the only bit of countenance showing among the swathing of bandages. A bony, trembling finger of his less injured left hand almost touched the servitor's nose. Then, instead of the usual burst of abuse, the valet heard a smothered gurgle, and his employer fell back dead.

Still for a moment James Tate stood at attention, regarding the huddled form with hardly a tremor of his lean, gray, grave face. He had no doubt Peter Birch was dead. For thirty years—ever since, a young man of twenty, he began service with him—he had expected such an end. During half that time he had wished it. For, like most others, he hated the tyrannical miser. Yet for a generation, always on the point of leaving him but lacking the initiative to make the break, he had served him. Now, a little stunned at sudden freedom, he was wondering with one-half of his methodical brain why he had endured such slavery, and with the other half what would become of him now that it was ended. Presently there passed over his face a quiver of emotion, equal parts of hatred and elation.

But, even before Tate stooped to test the stilled pulse, the devil whispered in his ear an amazing answer to the second question. As he rose again, satisfied of Birch's death, his eyes burned with the heat of rapidly forming plans. Instead of rousing the household and calling the family doctor, he crossed the room and sat down.

It was six hours to daybreak. There was ample time to finish his plan and carry out its preliminaries before he was disturbed. The only inmates of the place, aside from himself, were the housekeeper and two maids. They were not enough concerned with their employer's welfare to be making annoying midnight inquiries. Peter Birch, despite his millions, lived kinless and friendless in the big, gloomy house with a third the number of servants required for such an establishment. Since his wife's death, ten years before, his only living relatives were two grandsons, now in the late twenties—Tom and George Birch, who had never dwelt under his roof and had seen him only at a distance. He had quarreled with their father, his only son, now dead, and disinherited him. Altogether, Fate had played most amiably into the hands of James Tate. The temptation was insidious. Its possibilities had been shaping themselves subconsciously ever since the motor accident three weeks before.

Peter Birch, private banker and usurer, had exemplified well the saying: To live long, acquire an incurable malady and take care of it. At forty-five, by craft, unbroken toil and self-denial, he had won two things: ten million dollars and a weak heart. Thereupon he took his doctor's warning to avoid all exertion and committed the second of his only two indulgences. He engaged James Tate, son of an English butler, as a combination of valet and secretary—a capable buffer between himself and the world he had swung so fiercely by the tail. Tate had become Birch's *alter ego*, living his life, thinking his thoughts, acting as his hands, feet and secondary brain.

The crabbed miser's other indulgence had been the unstinted exercise of an explosive temper, magnificent in proportions and amazing in unreasonableness. His doctor's warning that he was likely in any one of these outbursts to make a sudden and unpeaceful exit from the scenes of this life served only to bring on another tantrum. One of the usually sedate James Tate's few amusements had been reporting to his fellow servants below-stairs each fresh and frequent attack, aping his master's voice and manner with adeptness perfected by long practise. Indeed, from constant association James Tate caught himself time and again falling unconsciously into Birch's idiosyncrasies.

"He'll go out in one of 'em sure as fate," Tate would wind up. "And I hope he does."

Then frequently, after a period of ruminating silence, he would add:

"Think of all those millions for somebody to spend! I'd like a chance at it once. I'd show how it ought to be done."

And now he was going to do it! He was going to take full toll for his years of underpaid, humiliating service and make come true the dreams of a cramped youth. James Tate glanced at the silent figure on the bed and shuddered slightly.

An hour later Tate stole from the house, bearing an unwieldy bundle. In cautious silence he staggered down the long wooded slope of the lawn to the lake that washed its margin. Gingerly he laid his bundle in a boat swinging at the wharf's end, then stepped in himself. He pushed out with muffled oars. Soon the dim shore-line faded in blackness, and he knew deep water lay beneath him.

Inch by inch he raised the limp bundle from the thwarts and lowered it over the side until he felt water close about it. There was a faint ripple, then silence. The man in the boat peered down for a moment into the black flood as though his vision might pierce its depths and his ears catch a sharp voice in profane protest at this outrage. The melancholy hoot of an owl came mournfully from the wooded shore. For the second time that night James Tate shuddered.

The funeral of Peter Birch was over.

MRS. AMELIA HAWKINS, estimable widow and recent incumbent as housekeeper in the Birch home—the old man's servants other than James Tate were always recent incumbents—virtuously planted spare feet on the rug at her bedside before her alarm-clock finished its announcement of the hour of six. A moment for a final yawn, and she started for the door to waken her staff. Then her darting, nervous eyes fell on an envelope thrust half across the sill. Wonderingly, she picked it up. It was addressed to her in a round, meticulous hand which she recognized as that of James Tate. Opening it, she read this disturbing note:

> My Dear Mrs. Hawkins:
>
> I am sorry to cause you this inconvenience, but Mr. Birch in one of his fits of temper has summarily dispensed with my services. As usual, it was a mere nothing. I had placed his water-glass not quite conveniently to hand, according to his notion, and he upset it. I ventured to remonstrate, when he abused me, with the result above stated. I offered to stay till he had replaced me, but he ordered me out of the house at once. I am, therefore, catching the early train into the city. I will send for my belongings when I am located. May I suggest, for your own guidance, that you wait upon Mr. Birch immediately on rising and ascertain his wishes as to hiring my successor. If you keep out of his way as much as possible except when summoned, I think you will have little trouble for a day or two till a new man arrives, as he is getting so he can wait on himself pretty well again. Regretting this informal departure and wishing you all success, I remain,
>
> Faithfully yours,
> James Tate.

"Land sakes!" she fumed. "After thirty years for him to leave like this, and me here bare thirty days and hardly knowing Mr. Birch from Adam."

She scurried across the hall and roused the cook and second maid, reporting the revolutionary happening in awed whispers.

"I certainly dread like sin waiting on him even for a day. Just twice since I've been here has he really spoke to me, as you might say. For the rest, I've had glimpses of him walking in the yard or passing through a room. Mr. Tate was the go-between, you might say. Mr. Tate was always so calm-like. How we'll manage without him I can't see."

At seven Mrs. Hawkins tapped timidly on her employer's door.

"Well! Who is it?" quavered a high-pitched, petulant voice.

"It's Mrs. Hawkins, sir. Mr. Tate left a note saying he'd gone."

"The double-damned blockhead! Bring my breakfast, and then telephone the agencies to send out some sample nincompoops who want jobs as valets."

Within the bedroom, the one exposed eye of James Tate winked solemnly from the pillow of his late master. Fortunately for Tate, the eye was also a cool gray that had suddenly taken on a quality of piercing alertness. As for the rest of him, bandages, the duplicates of Peter Birch's, concealing his face, together with Birch's nightshirt and bedclothes, left not a peg on which to hang suspicion that this was not the bed's owner.

Certainly the excited and apprenhensive Mrs. Hawkins entertained no such doubt as she brought in the breakfast-tray, hardly daring to look at the muffled form she served. Tate accepted her attentions silently until she began fussing about the room, "tidying up."

"Get out! Leave things alone!" he snapped in his best Birch manner.

For an instant he was startled at the sound of his own voice. He had the uncanny feeling that Peter Birch himself had spoken.

Mrs. Hawkins went, and stayed not on the order of her going. Tate recovered at once and felt a sense of growing confidence and elation. The first bridge had been safely crossed. Absorbed in his schemes, he nearly finished the frugal breakfast of Peter Birch without giving thought to his food. But as he drained the last of the single cup of coffee Birch allowed each person of his household to a meal, including himself, he thought to wish for a second cup, as he had wished in vain every morning for thirty years. At that his mind reviewed the stinted, unvaried menu with disgust—half an orange, a dab of cereal, two slices of toast sparingly buttered and one cup of coffee.

"Nice breakfast for a millionaire!" he muttered.

Mrs. Hawkins appeared at his ring.

"I want my meals changed hereafter," he announced. "Doctor says I need more variety. I'll try it. Bring me for luncheon—ah—bring me—instead of my usual luncheon—ah——"

Tate had to stop and think. Practise had not made him perfect in ordering rich and varied viands. His mind harked back for hints to boyhood memories of foods desired and generally forbidden, and he evolved from them what seemed to him the acme of taste and profusion in menus.

"I'll have a bowl of consommé, some squabs on toast and Saratoga chips, celery, artichokes, corn muffins and orange ice-cream, and a pot of coffee with plenty of rich cream."

Mrs. Hawkins, hardly hiding her amazement, was turning to the door when he spoke again.

"Ah—by the way, Mrs. Hawkins, might as well order enough of that for all of you down-stairs. Doctor's been talking to me about need of feeding well if you're going to be right on the job. I want my people up and coming. That's what I pay for."

"If that's what he needs for what ails him, I hope he stays sick for a year," affirmed the cook, when Mrs. Hawkins reported.

BUT Tate was already suffering reaction. He had fallen to computing with pad and pencil the cost of his repast so impulsively ordered. Birch had taught him to make an immediate pencil memo of all expenditures ordered or planned. Conceiving this menu had been an emotional process of James Tate's. The settlement involved the intellectual methods of Peter Birch. In a half-panic he reached for the bell-button to call back the housekeeper and modify the order. Then he checked himself angrily and threw the memo-pad aside.

"Cost! Cost! Cost! All I've heard for thirty years! There'll be no more talk of cost in this house while I'm its master."

He swung himself out of bed and cautiously locked the door. Turning back toward the window, his eye caught sight of a broken pull-cord. Mrs. Hawkins must have done it when she drew back the curtains that morning. He had noticed this one was nearly frayed through. Confound the woman!

Those curtains-cords had cost fifty cents a pair when they had been installed ten years before. There were eighty pairs of them. Tate remembered the bill well, and how the old man had roared. He picked up the broken piece and started to tie it.

Again he caught himself up short. With a snort, he tore away the rest of the cord.

"Cost again! I'll order new cords throughout the house to-morrow."

As he turned to pick up his pad and estimate the cost of this renovation, he caught in the mirror a glimpse of his reflection, the seeming presentment of Peter Birch. Involuntarily he shrank back a little; then, in a rage at this third show of weakness, he advanced upon the mirror and shook his fist at the grotesque image. The eye into which he glared glared back with a perfect reproduction of the fire he had last seen in the eye of his chief.

"Peter Birch," he rasped, "you're not going to bullyrag and pinch me any more! I'm going to make you spend, spend, spend, as you ought to have been spending these fifty years. I'm going to make your money of some use to those who know how to enjoy it. You sha'n't prevent me! Do you hear? You're going to spend, spend, spend!"

THE dingy, low-roofed, rambling home of Peter Birch had always been a pariah among the smart modern dwellings of the prosperous suburban colony. While other houses nestled seductively in shrubbery, the Birch place crouched forbiddingly back of matted, unkempt evergreens, its weathered dark-green hue blending with somber foliage.

"That old morgue," the neighboring resident would say, driving by with a guest, "is the home of the richest and stingiest man in Lake Bluff."

"It might be made a very attractive place," a discerning visitor would often remark.

The resident usually explained that it never would be, inasmuch as the heir to the property was of the same hard-shelled type as the present owner.

Nevertheless, such change was coming to pass, and that, as all Lake Bluff supposed, while Peter Birch still lived. It was a neighborhood sensation. A landscape-gardener with a platoon of laborers was finding outlet about the grounds for several thousand long-dammed-up Birch dollars. Carpenters, painters, interior decorators, house-furnishers had joined in a neck-and-neck bill-raising race. Passers saw through newly opened vistas evidence of a servant-staff multiplied overnight, a liveried chauffeur in command of a fleet of new motors, a butler at the door, flashes of neatly capped and aproned maids, a resident gardener and assistant. Mrs. Hawkins no longer responded in person and dishabille to the contemptuous ring of the grocer's boy. She no longer darted about her duties, but swept grandly on in becoming black.

"Has old Birch gone crazy?" a neighbor demanded of Dr. Abel Clarke, meeting the old man's latest physician on the street.

"Well, I'm not attending Mr. Birch any more, but I should say offhand that he was never more sane in his life," said the doctor.

Tate's second step had been the elimination of the doctor, who would have immediately discovered his imposture. The last dressing before Birch's death had shown the wounds healing nicely. Therefore it was in keeping with the Birch character and practise to refuse further medical attention, quarrel by letter over the bill and announce that he would employ another doctor.

"I think I convinced him he hadn't long to live," the deposed physician told the inquirer. "He realizes he can't take his money with him. It's natural enough, too, that, with death coming on, he should soften a little toward his relatives. I understand his two grandsons are to live with him hereafter. George, the younger, is a charming fellow and has a charming wife. Probably they've influenced him to cut loose."

"But I thought he'd willed all his property to Tom, the older grandson?"

"So I've understood. He kept track of the boys indirectly, I'm told, and when he found Tom was the money-maker and caretaker, he picked him for watch-dog of his millions. George is a total loss in money matters."

The apparent reversal of Peter's Birch's attitude toward his grandsons was the final touch of irony in James Tate's plan. He purposed to enjoy the vicarious pleasure of watching George, the paramount spender, in action. He would multiply his own joy in seeing the hated Peter Birch's worshiped wealth squandered by forcing the hated heir to stand by and watch the scattering of his patrimony.

By the time the two grandsons arrived on the scene, Tate had made his position copper-riveted. When the health of

Peter Birch first failed, he had placed his property with a trust company of which he was a director and large stockholder. As double safeguard he had made his lawyers cotrustees. At first Tate had accompanied him daily to the city, where he kept in first-hand touch with his affairs. The valet-secretary gradually learned every detail of his employer's investments. He came to think with Peter Birch's mind as to their disposition. That directing thought could as well go on for a little time without break if Tate could conceal from the lawyer the fact that the brain having legal initiative had ceased to function.

IT WAS the very closeness of Birch's arrangement with his lawyers that gave chance of success to Tate's audacious plot. The week before Birch's death the head of the law firm handling the property called at the old man's request, bringing with him a senior clerk who was to act as legal errand-boy for this important client during his illness. Birch had demonstrated to his lawyer's satisfaction that he was still mentally capable of directing his affairs and most positively intended to do so.

The only difficulty was a physical one. His injured right arm could no longer direct a pen along the characteristic angular signature of Peter Birch. He could make no more than a scrawling mark. It was arranged, therefore, that the law clerk should have power of attorney to countersign all checks and documents as witness to Birch's mark. He was to call once a week thereafter to attend to paying bills and other necessary business and to bring from the trust company such cash as was requisitioned. Fortunately again for James Tate, the young lawyer had seen little either of Birch or his valet. In the dimly lighted room he naturally detected no change in the figure behind the bandages. Tate's witnessed mark had been accepted readily, therefore, as that of Peter Birch on checks and documents by lawyers and trust company.

All his other dealings with the outside world he carried on by message through his new valet, whose chief recommendation had been his lack of astuteness. Tate had only to avoid any close intimacy with the grandsons to continue the drama safely as long as he wished.

Holding to his pose of invalidism that demanded quiet and seclusion, he granted a brief audience to the young men in the late afternoon of their arrival. Tom, as he entered the room ahead of his brother, seemed to brush the younger though physically larger man peremptorily aside with the conscious manner of the heir showing an interloper his place. He was a spare, hard-looking young-old man of twenty-seven, already graying.

George, a half-head taller and with the plumpness of good living, followed his brother with no apparent consciousness of the other's manner. Tate warmed to him.

"Just the man to spend a gentleman's income as it should be spent," he thought.

"Useless waster!" he seemed to hear the spirit of Peter Birch rasp in his ear.

But Tom was speaking.

"How do you do, sir? I am Thomas, and this is George. I was sorry to hear of your accident. Hope you are better." There was no hint of warmth in the thin voice.

George edged easily round his brother and impulsively thrust out his hand, then withdrew it as he saw the apparently helpless roll of bandages on the coverlet. Tate noted genuine sympathy in his face.

"I'm terribly sorry," George said. "Are you sure you feel equal to having a noisy bunch around? It's awfully good of you to ask us."

James Tate spoke for the first time, a speech carefully studied to conform to the Peter Birch manner. He put into the voice his best imitative work.

"Needn't thank me, either of you. It suits my plans to have you get used to the property before I go, which'll be soon. I've given orders to the trust company to set aside a good income for each of you until my death. They'll honor your checks from to-day on. How's business with you, Tom?"

"Going well, sir. I was made partner in the firm a year ago. I put in my savings and gave notes for the balance of my interest, to be paid for out of profits. Business has boomed so this last year that I'm nearly paid up. I've been thinking just now, when you mentioned an income at my disposal, that, inasmuch as I have no personal needs, I will invest that income in good negotiable bonds and stand ready to take over a control of the business, which I think will be on the market soon, as the senior partner is in feeble health and about ready to retire.

Perhaps you could recommend the best bonds to buy."

"I'll think it over and let you know," said James Tate dryly. How this young man's smug speech would have pleased his grandfather! "How about you?" he asked George.

The younger grandson grinned half apologetically, half hopeful of being understood. Tom cast him a swift look of contempt.

"Well, you see," George began, "I've been having a rather tough time. I was making a fair salary with the Howe people when I married, but the two babies came and I got into debt. Three months ago I lost my job and haven't another yet. The allowance will help me out. There are a lot of thing Molly and the kids need. They're a pretty fine trio. You'll love 'em when you feel fit to see 'em."

That was decidedly more to Tate's liking, he thought, but after the young men had gone he found his mind drifting into a consideration of what bonds he had better recommend to Tom Birch. Automatically he reached under his pillow for his ever-ready pad to jot down some suggestions. And again he was enraged to catch himself at it.

"Damnation!" he thought. "Tom Birch, indeed! He'll be rich as old Peter by the time he's forty without any help at all, and he's already as hateful. And there's George, with a nice little family. He needs it. And here I'm just giving 'em a taste of it to snatch it away again!" After a moment more of disconsolate thought, he suddenly sat sharp upright in bed. "Never! It'll be George who'll throw out Tom. Why not? I'll make a new will for Peter Birch!"

GETTING the valet out of the room early next morning, Tate locked himself in and fell to drafting in neat penciled hand in his old loose-lead memo-pad the will he had spent a nearly sleepless night over. He had summoned the Birch lawyer by telephone at his house the evening before. He was due at ten.

Tate's almost uncontrollable instinct was to hedge in the property with provisos and trust funds, as Peter Birch would have done. He seemed to feel old Peter reaching over his shoulder, guiding his pencil thus. But he had a sense of the post-mortem triumph of his old employer, and ended with a simple paragraph leaving everything unconditionally to the younger grandson. He committed this to memory, then hid his pad and, calling in his valet, dictated it to him.

A matter so important as a new will demanded the presence of the head of the law firm. Tate was therefore unusually cautious. He covered his one exposed eye with tinted spectacles and feigned a spell of weakness that excused him from much talking. The valet read the draft of the document. The lawyer suggested a few verbal changes, which were accepted with a nod. James Tate affixed the mark of Peter Birch, which was witnessed by Mrs. Hawkins and the lawyer's assistant.

"You may take this and keep it with your papers at present," Tate directed the lawyer. "I do not wish the young men told of the change yet."

Tate lay and gloated after the lawyers had gone. His plan had gone way beyond his original dream, when he had thought merely of giving the Birch income a temporary fling. Now the squandering had been made automatic. He could go away at his convenience and watch from a distance while the process went on uninterrupted.

Of course, he knew he could not keep up indefinitely this extraordinary rôle, but just as long as he could make plausible excuse for staying in bed and under bandages, he need have no worry over possible discovery. And the riot of expenditure went on unchecked.

Not that he laid no plans ahead. One of his pastimes during these days was the planning of his future. If discovery threatened, he did not intend by any means to leave empty-handed. He contemplated, however, nothing that he considered theft. His purpose was to take only the difference between the meager valet's wages he had received and the secretary's salary he felt he had earned, reckoned, of course, with compound interest over thirty years. Fixing that sum meant considerable debate. He told himself truculently enough at first that a secretary received as high as five thousand dollars a year and that he was really entitled to that amount. But when he figured out the total on that basis, he was appalled at the sum. After all, maybe he hadn't been worth that at first. So he compromised and pared down until at last he stuck at a lump sum of fifty thousand dollars.

Each week from the beginning of his impersonation he had drawn a considerable amount of cash and kept it in his safe. The required sum was complete now. It would simply stand on the permanent accounts as money drawn for Birch's personal cash expenditures. Let the heir wonder all he pleased how his grandfather spent fifty thousand dollars in cash in six weeks. He passed many hours musing over what he would do with this money.

But one day, after the novelty had worn off a little, casting about for some new sensation, he decided to make the acquaintance of George's family. James Tate was not gregarious, but he realized that after all he was a little lonely. He missed the gossip of the servants' hall.

Mrs. George Birch was a vivacious little blonde who all but smothered him with ebullitions of gratitude. The children, George, junior, aged four, and young Molly, two, insisted on climbing on the bed and mauling him about, in spite of their mother's intermittent correction.

"Here is an indulgent mother," Tate was thinking. "If there's any of old Peter's money left by the time they grow up, they'll finish scattering it."

"This is such a dear old house!" she was prattling on. "I do so want all our friends to see it. As soon as you are able to be around we must have a big party. May we? You do feel lots better, don't you? That bandage looks uncomfortable. Let me fix it."

She was bending over him, with her nervous little hands at his disguise, before he realized what she was up to.

"No! No!" he exclaimed, and it was fortunate Molly Birch did not know the natural voice of James Tate. She was surprised, however, at the unexpected strength of the arm that thrust her back.

"But I won't hurt you," she insisted. "I just wanted to make the wrapping a little more comfortable."

She made another tentative move toward him, and Tate, in his extremity, thought of only one thing to do. He gasped weakly clutched at his heart and whispered:

"Leave me alone. I'll be all right in a moment."

Mrs. Molly, in sudden panic, snatched her children from the room and sent the valet in to him, while she, unknown to Tate, telephoned for a doctor.

THE strange doctor, when he arrived, got no further than the threshold of Peter Birch's room. Not the genuine Peter himself could have treated him to a more noble display of rage. In sum, Tate told the caller, with many trimmings, that when a physician was wanted he would call one of his own choice.

"Evidently his heart-spell has passed," the doctor told young Mrs. Birch dryly, when he went out.

James Tate was grimly delighted. He'd show them who was boss here. He was still in a glow of satisfaction and rehearsing improvements on his form of tirade when Tom Birch came home that evening. That misguided young man, on getting the report from his sister-in-law, took it upon himself to go direct to his grandfather's room unannounced and remonstrate with him. He gave the invalid to understand not too tactfully that his grandfather must let him, as his heir, look after him and his affairs more closely and protect him from disturbance. He warned him against letting Molly and the children come in his room any more.

Tate led him on by alert silence.

"Another think I want to urge, sir," Tom pursued, thus encouraged. "I must remonstrate against the extravagance of George and his family. You are encouraging them to all sorts of follies. I——"

"That will do!" barked Tate.

And from there on the supposed invalid had the floor. Tom Birch had heard of his grandfather's temper. He hadn't supposed it could equal this.

"Don't be too cock-sure of your own standing, young man!" he wound up. "Don't ram into my room again unless I send for you. Now get out!"

Tom got.

James Tate sat up in bed and laughed silently. The play was improving again. He'd show young Tom, by thunder! He'd have Mrs. George and the kids in every day. Let's see; what would he buy the youngsters? He noted on his pad a list of toys for his valet to purchase. Then there was their mother. Little meddler, but meant well. Tom wouldn't put her down, anyhow. She'd wanted a party. Well, she should have it.

Peter Birch, the recluse, would give the biggest party ever held in Lake Bluff.

The Birch party was the affair of the summer season. All the élite of the colony were invited, and curiosity insured a nearly hundred-per-cent. acceptance. There was, in addition, a heterogeneous group of Tom Birch's business acquaintances and a homogeneous and rollicking crowd of the friends of the George Birches. Never were decorations so profuse and costly. High-priced entertainers furnished amusement between dances. The best orchestra and caterer from the city had been requisitioned.

Mrs. Hawkins, who had been watching from a crack in the door of the butler's pantry, saw a vision that sent her scurrying to the valet.

"What do you suppose?" she exclaimed. "Mr. Birch's sneaked down the back stairs and's watching through the back dining-room window. And him not out of his room for two months and just having another bad spell! It's taking his life in his hands, you might say. I just caught sight of his bandages and one eye against the window-pane. I wouldn't believe just one eye could talk so plain. When I first saw it, it was sparkling like it never saw anything made it so happy; then all of a sudden it got cold and thoughtful-like. I guess he thought he was going to like it better than he did."

A FEW days after the party, the second day of the month, James Tate sat alone behind his locked door. Before him lay the bills. For the usurper, this dawn was cold and gray indeed. This crisis he had met once before since his assumption of the Birch mantle. But the accounts then were mostly of old Peter's making. These were different.

Patiently, methodically, as he had been taught by Peter Birch thirty years before, he checked up the items with his penciled estimates. There were, as usual, many discrepancies, always in favor of the creditor. He felt old Peter at his elbow, following his reckoning. He could hear him damning each total and threatening to refuse payment.

"Eight thousand three hundred for doing over grounds!" he groaned. "Good Lord! Twelve hundred more than the estimate! I won't pay it!"

But finally he forced himself to return all bills to the pile, ready for the valet to fill in the checks. He was in no position to start trouble.

Making out checks—that would be the final concrete act of squandering. He computed the total again. Then he stared at it in growing misery. The face of old Peter Birch rose up between him and the damnable figures, alternately mocking and threatening. For a long time he sat struggling with himself. All the joy had finally gone out of his masquerade. Suddenly he jumped to his feet.

"I won't do it!" he declared aloud. "I won't sign another damned check!"

He went resolutely to the safe, threw the bills in a drawer, and from another drawer took the fifty thousand dollars he had been storing up for himself. All his movements were nervously eager now. He replaced his bandages, unlocked the door and climbed back into bed.

A few moments he spent counting the money over again and making some notes in his loose-leaf book. He had decided at last how he would use this money he called his. Then he thrust money and book under his pillow and rang for his valet.

"You may take me into the city this afternoon," he directed. "I'm going to consult a doctor there and may go on to Cleveland to see a specialist. I don't care to discuss it with the family. You may simply acquaint them with my wishes."

That evening James Tate, in his own proper person, registered at a modest hotel in the city. As Peter Birch, he had been installed with his valet two hours before at the hotel the old man usually patronized. Then he had purposely quarreled with his man and dismissed him. Telling the clerk at the desk that he would spend the night with friends, he had gone out at dusk. To resume his own character unnoted had merely required a taxi-ride to a quiet street in the outskirts, where he had dismissed the cab. Then he had whipped off his bandages and returned down-town by street-car.

Tate was free at last! He wanted to shout it to the clerk, to the passers in the lobby. For an hour he paced back and forth in his apartment, gloating over his plans for the future.

He had picked some good, safe unregistered bonds to buy. His money would yield him a little over two thousand a year net, on which he could live quite comfortably. He had yet to make Peter Birch's death official. It seemed safest to delay a few days until his money was invested. There would be less chance of discovery before the limelight was turned on the Birch family.

Ready now for his first free evening of pleasure, he went down to the lobby.

"What shows are there in town?" he asked the clerk.

"There's a good one at the Academy. I can get you seats for two seventy-five. The only other thing I can recommend is "Milly's Beau," light opera, at the Alameda. I've two good seats left for three dollars."

Tate shuddered at the prices.

"Isn't there anything cheaper?" he ventured.

"Here's a list of 'em." The clerk scornfully tossed a card over to him. "Try the vaudeville and movie bills."

Tate strolled down Main Street till a board in front of a shimmering cinema palace told him that behind the imitation-marble façade rare histrionic delights might be enjoyed for as modest a sum as twenty-five cents. But he found he had only fifteen cents in change. He balked at breaking a fresh dollar bill.

Somewhat let down in spirit, he returned to his hotel and sat in the lobby, trying to revive his first elation. But he was lonesome. Again he missed the servants' hall. An attempt to start conversation with a bell-hop was a failure, owing to that youth's erroneous assumption of a social barrier between them. He strolled past the bootblack stand and for a time stood criticizing to himself the technic of the colored operatives. Thirty years of practising that art on Peter Birch's foot-wear had taught him much that he could impart to these young men. Disgusting thought! He tore himself away.

An old gentleman was registering at the desk. Inattentive door-men had allowed him to carry in his own grip. Tate noticed, too, that his trousers were not quite freshly pressed and that there was dust on his collar. Obviously the old gentleman needed a good valet. Tate caught himself staring wistfully at the stranger as he disappeared in the elvator. Then, in even greater disgust at himself, he went to bed.

The week that followed reduced the gilded castle of James Tate's dreams to a pile of dry dust. Several days he dropped the Birch impersonation in order to complete the purchase of his bonds in small allotments here and there, so as to avoid suspicion. And he found, during those intervals of appearing in his own person, that the paying-out of actual cash for his living hurt more and more. For thirty years some one else had met all his expenses. He had never before felt the direct pull at the purse which all those years of training had forced him to hold sacred.

And, except when he was buying bonds, he had nothing to do. For thirty years his time and method of spending it had been allotted to him. Now he felt surrounded by an empty waste of duration without chart or compass.

HE BOUGHT the last of his bonds with a feeling of intense relief. Now he'd lay the ghost of old Peter. He no longer wanted to gloat over him. All he asked was to be free of him. Then he'd begin life over and really learn to live.

It seemed wise to record Peter Birch as alive once more before the finale. Behind bandages and smoked glasses he received the family lawyer in Birch's room at the hotel.

"I'm going to take the night boat to Cleveland and stop over a day to consult a specialist there," he explained. "Have you heard how things are going with the boys?"

The lawyer smiled a little hesitantly.

"Well," he began, "things seem to be going according to your wishes. Mr. George Birch is making the most of your liberality. He has already overdrawn his account a thousand dollars and borrowed as much more on a note this week. He has called on me as reference in opening accounts at several stores. My clerk went out yesterday as usual, not knowing you were away, and your housekeeper told him delivery-wagons were stopping there almost hourly and that they have a wild party at the house nearly every night."

Tate listened to further details and comments in a growing mood that surprised him. He seemed to feel the spirit of his late master take complete possession of him. Suddenly he spoke without apparent volition of his own, and the words were the last in the world he had thought of saying.

"The wasteful young pup!" he exclaimed. "That's the end! I see I made a mistake in making that new will. Go back to your office and bring it here at once and I'll destroy it in your presence. The old will, which is still in my safe-deposit box, leaving everything to Tom, will stand as it is."

Three days later the pseudo Peter Birch took passage at Cleveland for home on the night boat, *Silver King*. A little earlier he had booked another passage for himself as James Tate on the same boat.

As the *Silver King* was passing Lake Bluff that night, near the point opposite the Birch house, where a few weeks before James Tate had consigned the body of Peter Birch to the deep, there was a sudden clamor of "Man overboard!" A deck-hand had heard a man's cry of terror and had seen a white figure shoot past him into the water. James Tate was one of those who rushed half dressed from staterooms to see what they might see while the ship put about, lowered a boat and swept the water in vain with its search-lights. Finally a checking-up of the passengers showed the stateroom of Peter Birch empty and the window wide open.

Next morning, when James Tate came down the gangplank of the *Silver King*, the newsboys were already shouting the death of Peter Birch. The boat had docked at two o'clock, just in time for the morning papers to get out a late extra. The lonesome-looking elderly passenger whom no one had happened to notice about the steamer during the trip bought a paper and read the Birch story through twice. Then he walked up the street in something of a daze.

"Perfectly successful!" he murmured, with a sigh.

The paper stated that Mr. Birch suffered from heart-attacks, that probably one had come on him in the night and, going to the window for air, he had fallen out. This inference had been supplied by the family, when roused by telephone.

James Tate, reading the long and fulsome obituary that followed, had an uncanny feeling that he was perusing the account of his own life just ended. It left him with a helpless feeling. A disembodied spirit suddenly bereft of its physical being might experience some such sensation.

Now, as he wandered aimlessly along, his mind turned to Tom Birch and his task in taking over his new responsibilities. There were many details that his grandfather's old aide could help him with. Why, Tom Birch didn't even have the combination of the old wall safe that contained so many essential papers and records! Tate chuckled, but it had a hollow sound to his ears.

He was ruminating on the various tabulations he had kept so carefully, according to Peter Birch's directions, when he suddenly stopped short and turned pale. The next moment he frantically hailed a taxi.

Tate had recalled the memorandum he had made in his old loose-leaf note-book that morning of his departure, a week ago. At the last moment that morning he had decided how he would invest his money and, following the habit Peter Birch had taught him, he had made a pencil memorandum of it, slipped it under his pillow and forgotten it. Fortunately, it was not dated. Tate's handwriting would be recognized, however, and he would be wanted by Tom Birch to explain the matter of fifty thousand in bonds which his grandfather had apparently directed him to purchase and which could not be found. Their absence might be connected disagreeably with Tate's sudden disappearance that night when he began his impersonation. Such an investigation must not be started.

At the very moment when he thought that at last he was free, he found himself trapped by a habit his dead master had forged upon him. The spirit of Peter Birch had finally conquered.

WHEN the executors of the Peter Birch estate met in the dead man's room a few days later to check up the contents of his safe, James Tate was ushered in by Tom Birch.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is Mr. Tate, my grandfather's secretary, whom I have induced to remain with me. He is the only one who knows the combination of the safe and is familiar with the records."

James Tate, his back to the group, stooped and twirled the safe-knob with one hand, while his other strayed to his inside coat pocket. As the door swung open he drew from his pocket an envelope and slipped it unobserved into a pigeonhole of the safe. The envelope contained fifty thousand dollars in unregistered bonds.

An Appealing Blend of Love and Mystery

THOROUGHBRED

Constance Lee, Sure of Her Purpose before Meeting Clay Jeffries, Is Now as Uncertain as Detective Bell, Who Cannot Make Out Whether She Is Bent on Blackmail or Marriage

By Mrs. Wilson Woodrow

Author of "Swallowed Up"

Illustrations by O. F. Schmidt

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

IN THE good old pre-psychoanalytical days when mid-Victorian stencils drew broad lines of demarcation between good and evil, black and white, John Bell would either have engaged gloatingly to do Perry Gabriel's dirty work or else, without a second's delay, have spurned his infamous requirements and knocked him for a row of antimacassars.

Let us get the picture: Gabriel, a weedy, insolent representative of a New York fortune, standing with Bell, the private detective, on the board walk at Atlantic City, their attention focused on the lovely young widow, Constance Lee, who leaned against the railing, gazing seaward with Judge Clay Jeffries, a leading lawyer of Kentucky and owner of the famous stock farm, Beechlands.

Gabriel was interested in Mrs. Lee for two reasons. He had become infatuated with her and hoped to marry her; but when, after confiding certain business secrets to her, he found these used as a basis for blackmailing demands presented on behalf of unnamed clients by her lawyer, Louis K. Beachey, he wavered between suspicion and desire.

Determined to settle his doubts one way or the other, he engaged Bell to make a searching investigation of Mrs. Lee's character and associates. The result was baffling. Bell found that Mrs. Lee, although living a perfectly open life, was more or less a question-mark, a woman of mystery. Previous to her appearance in New York two years before, and her enthusiastic adoption by the rich racing set, there was no available record of her antecedents. He encountered a blank wall.

Posing as an electrical inspector on the search for defective wiring, he ransacked her apartment, and there came upon his single clue—a file of recent newspapers from the little Kentucky town of Bainbridge.

Mrs. Lee left for Atlantic City, Bell following. She maneuvered, as it seemed to him, an acquaintance with Judge Jeffries, a Bainbridge man, and he promptly concluded that she was planning another blackmailing *coup* and set himself to watch developments.

But he was able to discover nothing beyond the facts that she had recently added to her racing string a former cast-off of the Jeffries' stables named Joybells, a full brother and almost the counterpart of a colt, Sleighbells, with which Jeffries was hoping to win a rich juvenile stakes at Latonia.

After trailing the two for several days, Bell was forced to revise his opinion. Instead of trying to shear Jeffries, he decided that she was seeking to marry him.

At this point, Perry Gabriel arrived, impatient at the delay, and having seen Constance and Jeffries together, came to the same conclusion. Animated by jealousy and smarting for revenge, he ordered Bell to cease looking for proof against her and to manufacture it instead.

"Listen to me," he muttered thickly. "You get that woman. We'll drop this 'straight facts' business. Get her! Money's no object. Frame her if you have to, but—get her!"

Bell received the order imperturbably. He was like the rest of us—a mixed weave, neither pure black nor pure white. He was also a private detective with a wife and three children to support, and although he took a certain professional pride in being square, he had for years poked about in so many baskets of other people's soiled linen that his conscience was somewhat calloused.

Therefore he listened with his usual stolidity to Gabriel's directions and nodded his comprehension. It was not the first time he had heard such a proposal; it probably would not be the last. He took them as they came, a part of the routine of business. Not for him, at ten dollars a day, to respond in melodramatic subtitles.

CONSTANCE LEE and Jeffries had turned from the railing on which they leaned looking out at the ocean and were strolling slowly down the board walk.

"Do you want 'em to see you?" Bell asked in his matter-of-fact way.

"No!" snapped Gabriel.

"Then come this way." The detective guided his employer through the crowds and down a short flight of steps to one of the city's avenues, and then, by a roundabout way, back to Gabriel's hotel.

"Nothing more you want of me, is there?" he asked at the elevator.

"Nothing more I want of you now or at any time," Gabriel returned succinctly, "except to put this thing over as I told you. And don't take forever to do it, either."

"Shall I report to you here if anything turns up?"

"No. I am taking the first train to New York. Call me up there and make an appointment through my secretary when you've got something definite. In the mean time the less I see or hear of you the better. I can't be involved in this—understand? I don't even want to know what you're up to. Only, get busy."

Without a good-by, even a nod of the head, he entered the lift. Bell took a quick step as if to follow, hesitated, reconsidering his impulse, and then thoughtfully made his way out to the boardwalk.

As he stood blinking a moment in the bright sunlight, he gave a slight start and drew back further into the entrance. Jeffries and Constance were just passing, and automatically, more from habit than inclination, he fell in behind them.

His mood was one of gloomy irritation, and yet as he edged through the groups of strolling sun-worshippers, his eyes always on the two before him, his expression changed to one of unwilling admiration.

"For the Lord's sake," he apostrophized Constance's graceful back, "if you're playing a crooked game, show up something! I don't want to stack 'em on you; but if I don't that ferret-faced darning-needle can get plenty that will. Aw, what's the use?"

Animated by no loyalty to Gabriel, but still ruled by the force of habit, he did his best to gather what fragments he could of their conversation. But their talk was idle and unimportant.

"I'm hungry," said Constance at last, looking at the tiny diamond-starred watch on her wrist. "It's after one."

"The Ambassador rises before you." Jeffries waved his hand and then laughed. "Do you remember that Dickens character who was walking with his sweetheart and said: 'Hello! Here's a church. Let's go in and get married.' I wish it were a church, and—well, anyway, here's a hotel. Let's go in and get luncheon."

Bell gave up in disgust. It is only the superdetective of fiction who can enter a restaurant, take a table a few feet away from the persons he is shadowing and overhear the astounding information they are breaking their necks to guard.

Jeffries secured the inevitable corner-table coveted by the man who wishes to be alone in a crowd with the one woman.

Those corner-tables—a little in the dusk of the room, a little remote, invincibly intimate. If the words that have fallen across them had all been dictographed, no library would hold those endless volumes of a lover's litany.

"It seems so quiet without Nannie," Constance said, when the order had been given. "Since she left last night there has been a sort of a hush over everything. I miss her—don't you?"

"No," he said hardily; "I do not. I am very fond of her, but I don't like a breeze blowing all the time." He moved a vase of daffodils out of the way. "When I want to talk to you and look at you, I don't want interruptions and obstructions of any kind."

Her smile always made him think of the dip of a swallow's wing. It was there, and then it was gone. Absent-mindedly she was touching the petals of the flowers with the tips of her fingers. Her thoughts had gone back to the night before, when Nannie Wendell, who was leaving on an evening train, had come into her room just before dinner.

"BLACK?" Nannie had remarked. "Of course you've no idea that it makes you look like a snowdrop and sets off your hair something wicked. What are you after, anyhow? Do you want to turn his head so completely that he'll spend the rest of his life looking out over his shoulder-blades?"

"There's some aromatic ammonia in the bathroom, Delia," Constance said pointedly to the maid, who was busy with the clasp of a string of pearls. "Get some for Mrs. Wendell. Haven't you been warned enough, Nannie, about this hooch one gets from the bell-boys?"

Mrs. Wendell threw herself on the bed, and, lighting a cigarette, twinkled her eyes and showed her teeth in a wide smile.

"Look at her!"—waving her hand dramatically at Constance. "Bangs away with her eyes shut and knocks over the fleetest bird on the wing! Good old Clay, that every sharpshooter below the Ohio River has been stalking for years!

"Why, Connie, sweet thing, it was worth the trip down here just to hear the artistic way you redeemed your bonehead buy of Joybells by explaining it as a tribute to the brute's blood. Priceless! And that reverential look in your eyes when you spoke of Bonny Bells!"

Constance changed the angle of a comb in her hair.

"I wasn't pretending when I explained why I bought Joybells. It was, as I said, solely because of my faith in the Bonny Bells strain. I can't believe that any of that get is really a quitter."

Nannie Wendell sat up with a spring.

"You won't get any argument out of me on that score," she agreed. "But don't forget that it takes the exception to prove the rule. Not two exceptions, though. That colt, Sleighbells, looks good to me. I'm going to take a chance on him in the winter books, even to the extent of mortgaging the old farm."

"I wouldn't," dissuaded Constance. "Not with his regular trainer laid up."

"Pouf!" Nannie crushed out her cigarette contemptuously. "If this colt is all that Clay says he is—the almost perfect duplicate of Joybells—I'll risk a bit of change on him, trainer or no trainer. That old skate you bought may be a bum now, Constance; but in his two-year-old form he was a race-horse."

Constance related to Jeffries the latter part of this conversation.

"I'll have to advise her differently, then," he said somberly. "It's foolish to put one cent on Sleighbells until he shows what's in him."

He was looking at her, but his face did not clear, although he saw a picture that was worth a gleam of appreciation—the dull blue of her frock, the dull blue of her hat, the vivid living blue of her eyes, with the freshness of the sea-winds and the sparkle of the sun in them.

"Don't scowl so over it," Constance admonished. "Nannie is probably just talking."

"Oh, that? I had forgotten about that. I was thinking of something far more serious. I've got to go to New York tomorrow, away from—from all this. That coal-lands business. I've spoken to you about it, haven't I?"

"I think you mentioned it once."

She did not say, "Tell me about it"—merely waited. But the hands that lay in her lap were tightly clasped.

"It has its complications. I'll try and

simplify them. You see, after the Revolution, my great-great-grandfather, Nathaniel Jeffries, a Virginian, received for his services in the Continental army a large grant of land in Kentucky. A part of it was in the Cumberland Mountains—waste land, useless for cultivation. It passed down with the rest from father to son, and we have always paid taxes on the number of acres named in the original grant largely as a matter of sentiment. A friend of my grandfather's named Logan, a painter of sorts, fell in love with the picturesque scenery, and with my grandfather's consent built a house on the mountainside and lived there much of his time, his descendants following his example. The property, indeed, was known all through that part of the country as the 'Logan place.' "

"And you—none of your family—ever in all those years attempted to assert your claim of ownership?" There was a slight, indefinable edge of irony to her question. "You allowed these Logans—is that the name?—to occupy your property rent free, and even to pose as the proprietors? That seems rather odd."

"Not to any one familiar with that region." He laughed. "This land, as I told you, was considered utterly worthless. Then, too, there was another reason. Nathaniel Jeffries' grant, according to the original survey, was described as following the meanderings of Stony Creek, but in the course of years the stream materially changed its channel, so that the tract occupied by the Logans was cut off and shifted to the farther side. Visiting the property so seldom, and holding it of so little value, we remained ignorant of this deflection and continued erroneously to regard the banks of Stony Creek as our boundary line. If the question had been put to us, we would probably have said, as did everybody else, that the land on the other side of the creek belonged to the Logans."

"And didn't it?" she contended, smiling perversely. "I don't know much about law. But you had done nothing to improve the land—just let it lie there. Hadn't you—what is it, they say—slept on your rights?"

"Except for one thing." He nodded his appreciation of her quick readiness in scoring the point. "Let me remind you that we had regularly paid the taxes on our full acreage—a paltry amount even in the aggregate, I must admit, but still indisputable evidence that we had never relinquished ownership to a single foot of the Nathaniel Jeffries grant or allowed it to lapse.

"And now," he went on, "we come to the dénouement. About fifteen years ago coal was discovered on the Logan place, and Woodson Logan, a grandson of the painter, laying claim to the land by adverse possession, or squatter's right, leased it at a substantial figure to the Stony Creek Coal Corporation, a company which had large adjacent holdings. Then, on making a resurvey of the old grant, I learned, to my surprise, that this coal-land was really mine. I at once entered suit to establish my title, and at the same time endeavored to effect an equitable compromise with Logan. But the old fellow was obstinate—or, rather, his attorneys were—and the case has dragged along into a bitter fight. Woodson Logan himself has died since the action was started, leaving his coal-land, together with other property, to an adopted daughter, and this girl, Caroline C. Logan, is now the principal defendant."

"I see. It makes an interesting situation, doesn't it? So far as I can make out, there is only one satisfactory solution." Her eyes flashed up at him in provocative mockery. "You will have to marry her."

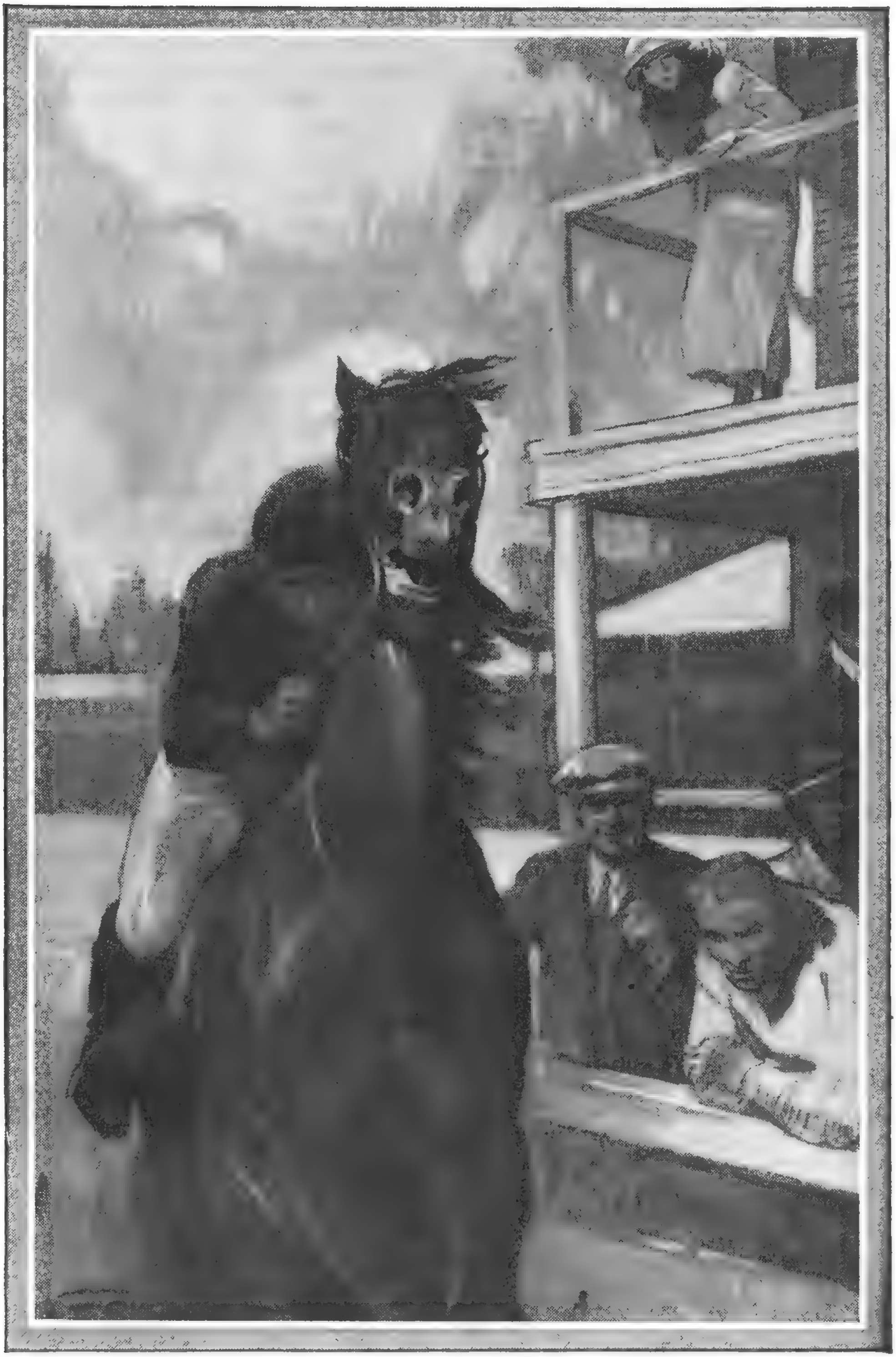
"Not on your life!" he disclaimed emphatically.

" 'An hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed,' " she murmured. "Nothing will appease you but this maid, wife or widow's mite; is that it?"

SHE still spoke playfully. There was no suggestion of innuendo in her tone. And yet it stung him—not the phrasing, but her point of view.

"It sounds rather grasping, doesn't it?" he said quietly. He wanted to stretch out his hands and clasp hers and cry out, "Constance, you couldn't think that of me after these days together!" But pride repressed the impulse.

"You misunderstand me. I am merely asking the courts to decide the justice of our respective claims. If she wins, all right; if I do, I shall certainly make some arrangement with her. Ethically, I consider that she has a certain claim. I shouldn't care to feel



"Take him back three furlongs, McEvoy," Constance directed, "and then come on. Let him out for all he's worth."

that I had deprived any woman of her income."

"But if the courts decide in your favor, such an arrangement as you suggest could only mean—charity. Chivalrous of you; but if I were Caroline C. Logan, I would not accept it."

Her tone was quite impersonal. She even made a little grimace which turned into a smile; but it failed to dissipate his bewildered sense of her disapproval.

"Not being Caroline Logan, you can hardly speak for her," he retorted quickly, and regretted the words as he uttered them. They might so easily lead to an argument.

BUT she did not take advantage of the opening.

"Caroline C. Logan," she said slowly, musingly. "It's a distinctive name at least. She interests me. The under dog always interests me. What is she like?" She was watching him keenly.

"I have never seen her. She is always represented by her counsel—able men, too, with a brilliant but dubious one among them—Louis Beachey."

"Really?" Again for an inscrutable second he felt the cloud deepen between them; then it vanished. She was smiling, gazing at him with a contrite appeal, her most adorable self once more. "I always take the woman's side instinctively, even in this case, where I know that you wouldn't, couldn't be anything but fair." She put a warmth, a sweetness in the words which blotted out her previous lack of faith. "But I don't understand why you should let this suit bother you or drag you away just now. You said the other day—did you not; or was it Nannie?—that you had already won in two courts."

"Oh, the suit?" He waved it aside as a matter of small concern. "Yes; I am pretty sure of winning that. This is more an affair of 'conditions subsequent,' as we say. I told you, I believe, that the property was leased to the Stony Creek Coal Corporation, and they are the only people who would want to or could operate there to advantage. The present arrangement must, of course, terminate with a decision in my favor, and I've got to know where I stand. I take it for granted that they would as soon lease the land from me as from Caroline Logan; but——"

Her eyebrows went up in surprise.

"You mean to say," she interrupted incredulously, "that you have no definite assurance from them—no contract?"

"An understanding with them—naturally. They are joined with me, although that is merely to protect their own interests as plaintiffs in the suit. But I have nothing essentially binding. It had not seemed necessary; their advantage so manifestly lay in renewing the lease. Recently, though, it has struck me that I should have something more explicit. My own affairs, you see, are— Forgive me." He jerked himself up short. "Really, I didn't mean— It's all your fault. That interested, sympathetic manner of yours is very stimulating to a man's ego."

" 'Oh, wise young judge!' " She looked at him sideways, a whimsical dimple in her cheek. "That's just a flattering way of telling me that you don't care to go on; it's none of my business. The canny counselor suddenly remembers that it's dangerous to confide in a woman."

"I'd confide anything to you, and you know it." She moved slightly under the intensity of his glance. "That is, if you are really interested."

"You know that I am." It was a whisper that reached him thrillingly. She leaned imperceptibly nearer.

He stretched out his hand to take hers, and then drew back—there were too many people about. He covered the impulsive movement by lighting a cigarette.

"The facts are simply these: I am being urged to go into politics, and my own ambitions lie that way. But a political campaign can absorb a good deal of money. I have the reputation of being a wealthy man, and it is true that my professional earnings are large; but I already have heavy demands on my income. Beechlands is a tremendous expense; there are years when it doesn't even pay for its upkeep. And so, you will understand, it is necessary for me to have something more from the Stony Creek Coal Corporation than a mere vague promise. I want them committed to me in writing."

"Yes; I see." She had dropped her eyes and was drawing lines on the table-cloth with her coffee-spoon.

"I have been in correspondence with their attorneys, and this morning I received word from them requesting me to come up to New York to-morrow for a conference. You know how these things go; we shall probably dilly-dally along for a week, threshing over immaterial details. And by the time I am free to come back, you will have left. Hang the whole thing!" he muttered, crossing his arms on the table. "It's spoiling the only real holiday I ever had. It's taking me away from you. I hate the thought of it."

Yes; he did hate the thought of it. He wanted to go on living through these shadowless days and not permit them to become a memory. He had seen a great deal of her, and yet not half enough; for both she and Nannie Wendell had met a number of friends, and he soon realized that she was a very popular woman.

He had always intended to marry, but he had been a busy and ambitious man. The flirtations of his twenties, more or less serious, ended in nothing. In his thirties he had decided that "the love which should flame through heaven" was not for him. He looked at life too steadily and comprehensively to be blinded by its handfuls of golden dust. He would choose a wife as he did a race-horse, soberly and advisedly; and so much the better for the future line of Jeffries.

But to every man his moment of illumination. His came to him on a night of sleet and snow, when a mad wind blew into his arms the loveliness that was Constance Lee. One moment he was what he had always been—the cool, competent master of his fate; the next he was gloriously, irresponsibly in love.

He did not blind himself to the difficulties in his path. A widow, young and independent, would not be easy of the winning; he took that for granted. Yet it was the deeper phases of the matter which troubled him. There was an undoubted sympathy of nature which drew them together; there was also some strange disparity which separated them. More than once he had caught her eyes fixed on him with a cold, still resentment, which passed before he could even wonder at its cause.

But there was no suggestion of this in her expression now, as she lifted her face to him. Her glance held a sparkle of allurement; her lips were coaxing.

"If you hate it so, why do you go? There is nothing so dreadfully imperative about the matter that I can see. And it never pays to appear too eager. Can't you induce these people to wait until next week?"

"I might"—hesitating. "I had not thought of that. As you say, there is no particular reason for any mad haste." He rose, his face clearing. "Will you excuse me while I telephone? Maybe I can save my holiday after all?"

"And mine, too," she added, with arch persuasion.

But fifteen minutes later, when he returned, jubilant, to inform her that he had made the desired arrangement, he found her mood again changed. He wanted to sit there and talk; but she insisted that she must return to the Funchal—it was after three o'clock. And on the way back she seemed strangely withdrawn and absorbed in her own thoughts. That puzzling, cloudy barrier had once more erected itself between them. At the door of the hotel she nodded a hasty, indifferent good-by and left him.

In her own room, Constance threw off her hat and turned at once to the desk. Taking up a pen, she wrote steadily, almost feverishly, covering several pages without stopping. Having finished, she folded the letter and placed it in an envelope which she addressed to Beachey, affixing to it a special-delivery stamp.

This done, she lay back in her chair and sat with her eyes half-closed, looking seaward. The expression of hard determination faded from her face, leaving it agitated and uncertain; and then the earlier resolution returned. For perhaps ten minutes the conflict of emotions went on. She balanced the letter to Beachey on her hand. Finally, the stronger impulse prevailed. With a violent, decisive motion she tore the letter in half and threw it in the waste-basket.

The next morning, before the chambermaid came in, Delia retrieved the fragments, and while Constance was out on her morning ride, carefully pasted them together.

THE night after his return from Atlantic City Perry Gabriel attended a public dinner given for the benefit of some cause or other at one of the larger hotels, and found himself seated next to the sprightly and loquacious Kentucky colonel to whom Bell had turned for information of Jeffries.

The colonel, although not gratified at this contiguity, nevertheless began to voice some fluent amenities; but he was almost immediately interrupted by Gabriel.

"What's that crook doing here?" He did not bother to lower his thin, high-pitched voice.

Such raw lapses from good breeding annoyed the colonel, and yet he was not wholly without sympathy in the present instance. His eye had followed Gabriel's glance across the room.

"You refer to Louis K. Beachey, suh? If you will pardon me, I'd advise you to be more careful. He might take advantage of such actionable language."

Gabriel's face twitched.

"Oh, I see"—insolently. "He's from Kentucky, too. Both members of this club and all that sort of thing. He *is* from Kentucky, isn't he?"

"Strictly speaking," admitted the colonel, "he is; but not from my part of the state, suh. He has made more or less of a name for himself here; but—well, we don't exactly claim him."

Mentally the old man ran over what he knew of Beachey. Born in that jutting angle of the Cumberlands between Virginia and West Virginia, spelling out an education, like a far better man, by the pine torch at the cabin hearthstone, a schoolteacher at sixteen, then working his way through the Cincinnati Law School by no creditable expedients—it was said that he served as a "shill" at one of the Over-the-Rhine crap-joints—after his graduation, a struggling young practitioner at Catlettsburg, a brief career as a demagogic politician with a term in the state legislature at Frankfort, where, after the giving-out of certain valuable franchises, came a marked rise in his financial condition, then his removal to New York and the building-up of a lucrative if somewhat questionable practise.

These were the bare bones of his biography. They attested his ability and determination. But they did not explain the metamorphosis of the clay-eater into a dignified, astute counselor, the soap-box orator into the social bandit.

"Frankly, suh, the man is a puzzle to me," the colonel confessed, with a wag of his gray goatee. "He doesn't run true to form in any particular. His private life is, I understand, above reproach. He is a student as profound as Crittenden, as brilliant as Blackburn, and yet—well, it would be idle to deny his reputation.

"I reckon, suh, it's just the mountaineer in him. He was bred up to ruses and deceptions and ambushes in the feud warfare of the Cumberlands, and he has simply applied the lesson to outside life. He realizes that the best screen for lawlessness is the law, and he does all his sharpshooting from behind it. He's had some tight squeaks, I admit, but so far he has never been caught. You'll have to grant that he's a damn fine lawyer, provided you dare trust him."

Gabriel was listening with a more polite attention than he usually bestowed on any one. The colonel picked up many odd bits of information; he might give him a crumb of value without knowing it.

"I wonder how the fellow came to be attorney for Mrs. Constance Lee."

He was just a shade too eager. And anything he thought Gabriel wanted to know, it pleased the colonel to withhold.

"Really, I could not inform you, suh. I am not to that extent in the lady's confidence. It might be that she acted on the recommendation of some friend, as she did on yours, I understand, when she took on that scalawag of a DeVries as her trainer."

Having paid Gabriel back in his own coin and set him firmly in his place, the colonel turned his shoulder and entered into a long conversation with his neighbor on the other side.

GABRIEL left the dinner early. While he was waiting for his hat and coat he started at the sound of a low, urbane voice—Beachey's.

"Ah, Mr. Gabriel! You are just the person I was hoping to see."

Gabriel had little doubt of that. Beachey had followed him, and he had no difficulty in guessing the reason.

"This is a fortunate encounter for me"—the lawyer disregarded the surly mutter that served as an answer to his greeting—"as I want very much to have a little talk with you. If you can spare me half an hour now, we can go up to my apartment here in the hotel."

Gabriel began an excuse; but under the affable repetition of the invitation there was a hint of command. In spite of himself he yielded.

Beachey's apartment was Spartan for a man of his reputed income; the furniture and decorations simple and severe. They were met by a Japanese servant, who, after placing drinks and cigars upon the table, left the room. Beachey waved his guest to a chair under a tall lamp, and himself took one that was more in the shadow.

"You haven't yet told me, Mr. Gabriel"—when Perry had sulkily declined his liquor and tobacco—"just what you intend doing in regard to that matter I laid before you. My clients are becoming impatient."

Sliding his hands down in his pockets, he leaned back in his chair and waited for an answer; but Gabriel merely shuffled his feet irritably and twisted one hand in the palm of the other.

"Quite a material sum to disburse," Beachey said reflectively, "even for so wealthy a man as you. And I suppose it doesn't add any gratification to know that one is paying for a bit of folly. It *was* a bit of folly, wasn't it?" He lifted his eyebrows inquiringly. "I am not fully in the confidence of my clients, but I gathered in some way that the basis of this claim lies in a certain—what shall we say?—overloquacity on your part. Ah, how often we lawyers are forced to realize the truth of the old maxim: 'Silence is golden'! Golden in this case to the extent of sixty thousand dollars, Mr. Gabriel; for how can you escape paying?"

"Sixty thousand!" Gabriel leaped in his chair. "You said fifty thousand before."

"Yes; but that was ten days ago. And I told you my clients would raise the amount ten thousand dollars for each week of delay."

Gabriel stood up, shaking with anger.

"You can't bluff me this way, Beachey! I've laid the whole thing before Kent, Hulsberg & Greeley, and if I say the word they'll have you arrested for blackmail. Get that, for it's straight." He sat down and shakily lit a cigarette.

BEACHEY turned his head lazily on the back of his chair and took Gabriel's measure, a flicker of scorn in his saurian eyes.

"No doubt your lawyers would be delighted if they could take action against me. But how would that be possible? My clients have led me to believe that they have sustained financial injury because of your betrayal of certain business secrets, and I am asked to present their claim to you. They may have misled me. If so, your redress is easy.

"In a case of blackmail, Mr. Gabriel, there are just two courses for the victim to pursue. One is: ignore the demand and take the consequences; the other is: pay."

Gabriel took out his handkerchief and dabbed at his forehead.

"Look here, Beachey," he broke out desperately; "let's settle things. You're open to a deal, of course. I've offered mighty liberal terms already. But tell me who's behind this hold-up and I'll go further."

The lawyer flopped a languid hand.

"A waste of time, Gabriel. I don't sell out my clients."

"Well, I know who it is, all right," Gabriel muttered huskily. "And, by God, I'll prove it before I'm through!"

There was a flash of fire in Beachey's eyes, immediately suppressed.

"Go ahead and try. But it will cost you just ten thousand a week. Yet why discuss unpleasant contingencies?" He picked up a paper-knife and bent it back and forth between his fingers. "I sought this interview to-night, not so much to push this claim as to adjust it."

"Adjust it?"

"Yes; a suggestion has come to me whereby we may reach a compromise. I don't want to be overoptimistic, but it may be an absolute withdrawal of the claim."

"You mean you'll drop it?"

"Possibly—under certain conditions." Beachey replaced the paper-knife on the table and ceased to lounge. "Gabriel, you are, I believe, rather closely associated with Sinclair Jamison and Isidor Kathe in a number of your corporations, aren't you?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Those two would be likely to do anything you asked them, wouldn't they? Anything in reason, that is. Especially if it didn't mean much to them one way or the other."

"Why, yes; I suppose so." Gabriel was still wary, although he was beginning to catch Beachey's drift. "By George, they'd have to, no matter what it meant to them, if I choose to put the screws on. But where do Jamison and Kathe fit into this thing?"

"Through their control of the Stony

Creek Coal Corporation. What I want of you is to see these two men and have them instruct counsel for the coal corporation to withdraw from any further participation in the suit of Clay Jeffries versus Caroline Logan *et al.*, and to break off all support or dealings with the plaintiff, Jeffries, of whatever nature."

"Clay Jeffries?" Gabriel's pale eyes narrowed. "You don't mean, by any chance, Judge Clay Jeffries, of Bainbridge, Kentucky?"

"That is the man. You know him?"

"No. But I saw him down at—that is, I've had him pointed out to me. But that doesn't matter. Let's get the rest of it straight. You want me to tell Jamison and Kathe to put the kibosh on this Jeffries in a suit against——"

"Caroline C. Logan *et al.*"

Gabriel drew a card and pencil from his pocket and noted down the style of the litigation.

"And if I fix Jamison and Kathe, you'll agree to call off this hold-up?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Gabriel," Beachey assented, after his usual deliberative pause. "If satisfactory action is taken by the Stony Creek Coal Corporation, I think I may safely promise that you will be bothered no further by my client. There would, of course"—he pursed his lips—"be a moderate fee for my services in the premises—say, ten thousand dollars. But that would end the matter so far as you are concerned."

Gabriel was puzzled. The interview had taken a strangely confusing turn. What possible connection could there be between the demands of the blackmailers and this coal-company litigation? He felt as if he held in his hand a mass of tangled threads, and yet they might lead to something if he only knew which to follow.

He glanced again at the card in his hand.

"Who is this Caroline Logan?" he asked.

"A client of mine, the residuary legatee of Woodson Logan, deceased."

"That doesn't tell much. What is she? Where——"

Beachey held up a deterrent hand.

"Information of that sort was not stipulated in our agreement," he said dryly.

"Who's the '*et al.*,' then? You can tell me that?"

"Oh, yes. That includes some mountaineers down in Kentucky—small squatters. This is an action brought by Jeffries, you understand, to recover title to certain coal-lands."

"Then this Caroline Logan is the one that counts, the real loser in case Jeffries should win?"

"That is about the substance of the matter."

GABRIEL sat tapping his pencil on the card. He was not without a certain uncanny penetration where his own affairs were concerned; and as he put two and two together, he found that it made a rather startling four.

Caroline Logan was Beachey's client. So, also, was the unknown blackmailer. And so, also, was Constance Lee. But he was already convinced that Constance Lee and the blackmailer were one. Now, according to Beachey, the blackmailer was willing to give way to Caroline Logan. Did not that indicate that Caroline Logan and the blackmailer were one? It looked like it. But the blackmailer and Constance Lee were one. What conclusion was to be drawn? Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. Caroline Logan must be Constance Lee.

He placed the card carefully in his billfold and got up.

"I'll see Jamison and Kathe first thing in the morning," he promised, and took his leave.

Down in the lobby of the hotel he stepped into a telephone-booth and, calling up Bell at Atlantic City, instructed the detective to come to New York at once and present himself at Gabriel's house before nine o'clock the next morning.

Bell welcomed the summons. If anything had occurred to side-track Gabriel, so much the better, and he was further heartened when, on keeping the appointment, he was greeted with more good humor than his employer had yet shown.

"Nothing done yet, I suppose, along the line I laid out for you?"

"Nothing I'm ready to report," Bell temporized. "It takes a little time to set up the pins and stretch the wires."

"You're slow." Gabriel spoke patronizingly. "While you fool round, I go in myself and get everything that's needed. Straight stuff too; no frame-up. Here!" He handed Bell a slip of paper on which he had copied the memorandum from his card.

"You take that and start for Kentucky by the first train. Find out all you can about all the people involved, and especially about this Caroline Logan. Trace her up from the cradle to the present time. And let's see"—jocularly—"if for once you can show half-way ordinary intelligence."

Bell blinked at him, devoted several minutes to a study of the memorandum and then looked up with a dawning comprehension.

"If I get you right," he said, "you think that this Caroline Logan is——"

"Constance Lee," interrupted Gabriel. "Of course! Any fool ought to dope that out. Why, the initials alone are enough—C. L. I caught it the minute I heard the name."

The telephone-bell broke in upon him, and he reached out for the instrument.

"You've got your lead now." He threw the words over his shoulder. "And you ought to know what to do. So beat it for Kentucky."

ON THE day that Jeffries and Constance Lee arrived in New York on an early-afternoon train, they were met at the Pennsylvania Station by Nannie Wendell, full of plans for the afternoon that included them both. But these projects Constance firmly waved aside.

She had arranged to see her stable-manager at four o'clock, and she had a dozen other things on hand. Her time, she said, would be fully occupied until she saw them again, reminding Nannie that they were all to dine together that evening.

"You won't let her forget," she said to Jeffries. "A quarter to eight."

"How could I, when I'll be counting the minutes to that far-away time?" he asked, standing hatless before the door of her car, and in a voice so low that it could not reach Delia.

"*Au revoir*," she said, under her breath. The door closed. She was gone.

The swirl and roar and tangle of the city engulfed him. Hither and thither Nannie flew. He felt like a penguin trying to follow the dartings of a humming-bird. Shopping. Tea later, at the Wendell home, with more people than he cared to see.

But at last it was over, and they were rolling down Fifth Avenue, every revolution of the wheels bringing him nearer to Constance. There were wings in his heart as the lift carried them up to her apartment.

But when he met her he felt a shock of surprise, a pang of self-reproach. He had forgotten, or, worse, had never realized before the wonder and charm of her. Hopelessness, not lasting but poignant, succeeded. Down on the coast, her background had been the sea, the sunshine, the stars; but here her environment seemed so much a part of her. It was all so settled, so complete. The flower bloomed in its chosen spot. How dared he suggest a transplanting?

There were no other guests; he became happier when he saw that. Just Nannie and Hugo, himself and Constance.

Hugo, stout and ruddy, was something of a *gourmet*. He insisted that his coming was no compliment to his hostess. He never dined in the houses of lone women. That he made an exception of Mrs. Lee was due to his respect for her cook. To have secured such a treasure was a proof, he was convinced, not of Constance's genius but of a sort of invincible good luck that followed her.

"After that," she retorted, "the soup will of course be burned, the fish stale. I'm sorry, Judge Jeffries."

Her prophecy was false. Even Hugo, past master of the art of dining, exuded compliments and envy.

Later, they had just finished a rubber of bridge when Delia entered and murmured in Constance's ear that DeVries wished to see her on a matter of importance.

A line creased her forehead.

"Oh, have him in here!" cried Nannie, who had overheard the message. "I'm dying to hear how things have been going."

Constance hesitated, then nodded acquiescently to the maid.

DeVries was a thin little man, with the weather-beaten, wizened, tight face of a horseman.

"How 're you, Judge Jeffries?" he said, after he had spoken to the others. "I haven't seen you since last summer at Churchill Downs." He turned immediately to Constance. "Sorry to disturb your party, Mrs. Lee, but I had to see you to-night. I've been with King ever since I left you this afternoon. He's finally agreed to our figure on Lady Lou; but he's sailing to-morrow morning and he wants to get the purchase closed before he goes. So, if you'll give me a note ratifying the terms of the sale, I'll take it right down to him."

"Certainly. I'm glad to have it settled so satisfactorily." Constance rose and went to her desk.

Nannie at once began to ply DeVries with questions about Joybells.

"Joybells, eh?"—with a sidelong glance at Jeffries and a complacent smack which the Kentuckian felt was for his benefit. "Joybells is coming back, Mrs. Wendell. I guess I can't tell you much about the Bonny Bells colts, Judge, but they sure have got most awful strong likes and dislikes, and are full of cranks and whims. They can't bear this stable-boy, and they love that one. They want attention all the time, and they eat up praise. You've got to pet 'em when you want to swear at 'em. But most of 'em, now, have got ambition. Joybells hasn't—not a grain. He certainly had me puzzled. But Mrs. Lee got his number, and he sure fell in love with her. Why, she brought him out a fool black kitten and he went crazy over it—can't bear it out of his sight. He's coming on something wonderful under the butter-and-soft-soap treatment she prescribed for him."

"Do you hear that, Judge Jeffries?" Constance asked, coming back to the table.

"I'm mighty glad to hear it." He tried to speak sincerely, but to himself his voice sounded cold and unresponsive. He did not believe a word DeVries had said. Joybells had been too long a liability suddenly to be transformed into an asset—the horse was fundamentally unreliable. DeVries was rated a good trainer, but his personal reputation was against him. Whispers, nothing proved; the man wouldn't find it easy to get a job in a first-class stable. And all this enthusiasm about Joybells was unconvincing. His object was too plain. He was merely rousing false hopes in Constance in order to strengthen his own position with her.

Jeffries made a rapid decision. DeVries was her employee, and the way in which she chose to run her own stable was none of his, Jeffries's, business. Nevertheless, he wanted a few words with the trainer alone.

"Did you say that Mr. King is sailing to-morrow?" he asked DeVries. "Hm. Then I have no doubt that he has been keeping the telegraph- and telephone-wires humming, trying to get in touch with me. I have been attending to some business for him, and he will want to know the result before he leaves. Mrs. Lee, you'll understand and forgive me, won't you, if I go now with Mr. DeVries to King's hotel?"

"Of course," Constance said. "I'm sorry, but I quite see the urgency of it."

Under cover of the last half-dozen questions Nannie Wendell was putting to DeVries, Clay found an opportunity to say to Constance, as he bade her good-night:

"I hate this, but it's really necessary. And the worst of it is that I'll be tied up with the coal-company's attorneys all day to-morrow. But I shall see you to-morrow night, shall I not?"

The anxiety of his tone, the eagerness of his eyes made her flush. It gave him fresh hope.

"WHERE is King stopping?" he asked DeVries, as the elevator was carrying them down.

"At the Biltmore."

"We might as well walk, then."

Outside, they turned down Park Avenue, the lights of an endless procession of cars floating by them like huge fireflies.

"DeVries"—Jeffries was the first to break the silence—"to be quite frank with you, I take that story of yours about Joybells with an appreciable quantity of salt. Mrs. Lee has asked me to look over her string, and I have agreed to do so. If Joybells is really coming on as you say, I shall be delighted. But let me remind you that I am from Kentucky—which is 'horse' for Missouri."

DeVries stripped a stick of chewing-gum and put it in his mouth.

"Suppose you shouldn't feel satisfied? Joybells has his off days, you know. What then?"

"I shouldn't be in haste to make up my mind. But when it is made up, I am going to give the results of my unprejudiced observation to Mrs. Lee."

"Sure it will be unprejudiced?" DeVries asked, not making much attempt to veil his cynicism.

"Quite, as regards Joybells. Perhaps not entirely so as regards yourself. In your case I might be unconsciously influenced by certain past performances."

"I get you." DeVries's tone was cool enough, but the corner-lamp under which they were just passing showed that his upper lip was drawn tight. "But honest, Judge Jeffries, I'm giving it to you straight. You come out to-morrow, and I'll show you a work-out."

"I won't promise to come at any particular time. I prefer to arrive unexpectedly. But"—Jeffries stopped on the sidewalk and loomed threateningly above the trainer—"if you're up to any of your tricks, DeVries, the Lord help you, for it means the winding-up of your career. I came out with you to-night just to tell you that, and I think you know me well enough to be sure that I mean it."

He walked on, leaving the other man standing there. But the next moment DeVries was again at his side.

"Judge," he said, "I'm not pretending that I don't know what you mean or that my foot hasn't slipped a little once or twice. But not so bad as they've made out. I've been lied about more than any man on the turf. I'm not beefing about it; what's the use? All I'm telling you is that I've done my best for Mrs. Lee. I'm building her up as nice a little stable as any one could want. Come out and see for yourself, Judge; for it's God's truth."

In spite of himself, Jeffries was impressed by the trainer's protestations.

"Well, I hope so," he replied. "At any rate, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. Remember, though, that I intend to convince myself, and that, too, before I leave New York."

The opportunity came sooner than he expected; for the next morning, when he called at the offices of the coal corporation, the attorneys asked a further postponement of the conference until the following day.

He immediately called up Constance to inquire her plans for the afternoon, and, having none, she invited him to go with her out to the Jamaica race-track and give his opinion of her outfit.

It was mild, almost Maylike weather, and they found the famous oval filled with exercising thoroughbreds.

They came upon DeVries in the paddock, blowing up a stable-boy for handling, contrary to instructions; a pretty little filly.

"Blast your eyes!" he was storming. "Don't you bonehead swipes ever listen to a word that's said to you? An easy gallop for a couple of furlongs, I told you; and here you go out and run her head off for a full half-mile, and bring her in blowing like a bellows. Don't tell me she got away from you."

Seeing Constance and Jeffries, he dismissed the boy with a gesture and came to meet them. He was glib in his welcome.

"I suppose you've come out, Judge, to take that squint at Joybells you promised me. Just my luck"—drawing down the corners of his mouth—"for this is one of his off days that I was telling you about. 'Fraid you'll have to content yourself with just looking him over. He wouldn't do Mrs. Lee or me any credit on a work-out."

Jeffries's brows lifted cynically.

"Very well," he said shortly; "but let's have a look at him anyhow."

"No!" cried Constance. "That will not do. I want the judge to see him work. We can look at him in his stall at any time. But there may not be another day like this for a month. Give us a showing, DeVries; I insist on it."

The trainer still tried to beg off, but she was adamant. Seeing McEvoy, a star jockey, leaning against the fence, she beckoned him over and told De Vries to put him up.

Jeffries almost found it in his heart to pity the outwitted trainer as he slouched off toward the stables with the little jockey.

"Come over to the judges' stand," Constance said. "We want to be where we can see every foot of it."

He was sure she was in for a bitter disappointment, and yet he did not feel it wise to enlighten her or even temper the blow by suggesting possible excuses. Better that she should learn without delay the worthlessness of her purchase and the unreliability of her stable-manager. They crossed the track and made their way up into the stand.

THEY had not long to wait. It was only a few minutes before McEvoy, crouched on the back of the big chestnut, came jogging down the course. And in spite of his prejudices against both the old rogue and DeVries, Jeffries had to admit that Joybells looked every inch a racehorse. His head was up, his neck arched, and he moved with the light, dancing step peculiar to his strain.

Something like a lump rose in Jeffries'

throat as he saw his old favorite again, and his mind reverted to the hopes he had lavished on this cast-off of his in the days of his glory.

McEvoy gave the horse a turn or two round the course and then drew up before the judges' stand. DeVries, who was standing in the infield just below, chewing nervously on a stick of gum, stepped out to give the jockey his instructions. But Constance, leaning over the rail, waved him back.

"Take him back three furlongs, McEvoy," she directed, "and then come on. Let him out for all he's worth. Joybells"—caressingly—"do your prettiest. I'm banking on you."

The horse lifted his head at the sound of his name and pawed the ground. The jockey nodded his understanding, and they trotted slowly away to the starting-point, where McEvoy wheeled and waited for the signal. At the fall of Constance's handkerchief he began to ride.

As Joybells flashed past the first furlong-post, Jeffries looked up from his watch with a startled expression.

"I caught it in twelve seconds flat!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Me, too!" Her face was aglow with excitement. "But watch him come!" For Joybells was now fully in his stride.

Jeffries caught the second furlong in eleven and three-fifths seconds, although Constance made it a fifth slower.

And now the big horse was bearing directly down toward them. Everybody about the track had turned to watch the performance. Like a champion, he swept along, long neck thrust ahead. McEvoy, on his back, sat practically motionless, letting Joybells make the running for himself.

A thudding of hoofs, a blur of gold under the wire, and it was over. As McEvoy drew up and, turning, rode slowly back, DeVries came bounding up the steps of the stand, two at a time.

"Thirty-five and a fifth! I clocked it!" he shouted gleefully. "What does your watch say, Judge?"

"Mrs. Lee and I both caught it at thirty-five and two-fifths," said Jeffries. "But have it your own way. We won't quarrel over a fifth of a second on such an impressive showing."

"Fooled you, didn't I, Judge?" DeVries chuckled. "You thought I was just stringing you along. I wanted you to think that; I knew the old rascal had come back. Look at him! He's hardly blowing. And over on the Belmont track he'd have clipped that thirty-five and a fifth by almost a second."

Jeffries, generously ashamed of his doubts, held out his hand.

"DeVries, I take back everything I've thought against you. It seems almost a special providence that I came out here to-day. I've been looking everywhere for a trainer for my colt, Sleighbells, and now I've found him. If you say the word—and with Mrs. Lee's permission, of course—I'll wire out to-night to have him shipped on and placed under your charge."

The trainer caught his breath.

"Why—why, sure, Judge!" he stammered in his surprise and gratification. "And I'll handle him right, too. I think I've got the hang of these Bonny Bells horses now."

"But don't make a mistake, DeVries, and get him mixed up with my Joybells." Constance laughed. "They say the two look so much alike you can hardly tell them apart."

THAT evening, on her return from Jamaica, Constance found a note from Beachey asking her to be at his office at eleven o'clock the next morning to discuss a matter of "immediate importance."

She had come in humming under her breath, vibrant with the ecstasy of youth and triumph. The memory of the afternoon was like a golden haze about her, shot with pictures now sharply distinct and now merging in a kaleidoscopic impressionism—pale sunshine, clouds, low hills and wide fields, Jeffries' Indianesque profile, Joybells' showing, Jeffries' surprise. She was just a little intoxicated with life. And then—this letter. The shadow of Beachey fell across her as she held it in her hand. She drooped into a chair, her radiance gone, and as she read it her spirit flickered and fell.

Then it soared in her again—a flame of mutiny. She crumpled the summons, threw it aside and resolutely put it out of her mind. She and Nannie and Jeffries were doing a play that evening; she was not going with them companioned by the unseen presence of Beachey.

Jeffries thought he had never seen her so brilliantly beautiful; but her gaiety was no longer spontaneous and natural. It had a brittle, cerebral quality that held him at arm's length.

However, when he and Nannie left her at two o'clock, she had promised to make that visit to Kentucky for which he had been pleading. His thanks were mute; he couldn't say the things he wanted to, with Nannie there.

"I'll give you three days. And then"—lowering his voice—"we'll be in Beechlands in time to find the trailing arbutus up in the hills."

Her face softened and grew wistful.

"In three days, then. It's a promise."

In utter disregard of Beachey she made an engagement for luncheon with Nannie, and accepting Jeffries' invitation to dine with him the next evening, said good-night.

She was still in a perverse mood regarding her lawyer's request when she woke in the morning. She told Delia, when the maid brought her coffee, that she intended to spend the forenoon in shopping. At the last moment, though, she changed her mind and ordered her chauffeur to take her down to Beachey's office.

Beachey met her, suave and smiling, his tone as composed, his manner as tempered as usual. But as he conducted her to his private office, Constance, who knew him, felt as if she were a child being led to correction.

"I began to believe that you had forgotten my existence," he said, with a sort of casual lightness, as if her gesture of revolt were hardly worth reprehending. He simply gave her warning that it had not passed unnoticed. "If there had been any reason for it, I might have suspected that you were wilfully trying to evade me."

She drew off her gloves and laid them across her lap. She was not looking at him, but he was at her with the old hunger in his eyes.

When he finished speaking she lifted her eyes and looked at him squarely.

"Yes? Why?"

He knew now that it was rebellion, and not indifference or carelessness.

"You remained longer in Atlantic City than you intended. Yet I heard nothing from you. You have been at home two days, and yet you did not let me know." He spoke quite gently.

"There was nothing to tell."

"Nothing to tell?" The satirical wrinkles showed in his cheeks. "You were with him day after day down there. At the same hotel. Breakfasting, dining, lunching with him. Driving, walking, sailing, dancing together. And still—nothing to tell?" In spite of his admirable self-control, a trace of bitterness infused his tone.

"But"—she enunciated the words distinctly—"I failed. Possibly you overrated my powers, or——"

"Or, more possibly, I overrated your inclination."

"Put it as you please. You will remember that I objected when you proposed my going down there. I am not fitted for that sort of thing. I detest it. But there is no use in holding a post-mortem. You will simply have to do the best you can without the information you wanted."

He shook his head, smiling at her quizzically and yet darkly.

"*Non sequitur*, dear lady. I generally manage to have more than one string to my bow."

CONSIDERING the interview over, she had begun to draw on her glove, but at this she pulled it off.

"You mean ——"

"That I have the information I wanted? Oh, certainly!" He had taken a penholder from the desk. It was a mannerism of his that he liked to hold something between those long, restless fingers. "My other agent did not seem to experience any particular difficulty in getting it. I am fully advised now on just how loose and indefinite a basis Jeffries' understanding with the Stony Creek Coal Corporation really is, and how necessary it is for him to secure a binding contract with them."

She made an impulsive movement, started to speak, and then checked herself. Her first surprise gave way to the conviction that Beachey was bluffing—pretending already to be in possession of the information that he hoped to extract from her.

"I suppose I ought to feel overwhelmed," she said indifferently. "But I do not. The other person you speak of—your more successful emissary—no doubt steamed letters or listened in on telephone conversations or something of the sort. Well, I can't descend to that kind of thing." A flash of anger darkened her eyes. "I told you——"

"No!" Beachey ignored the latter part of her speech. "I don't think there was any of the strategy you suggest. As I understand, it was merely a matter of engaging his confidence." He was watching her now through half-closed lids. "This other agent was a woman also, and Jeffries, I imagine, is rather waxlike in the proper feminine hands."

"Yes?" Constance was polite, but uninterested. The tiniest dimple showed at the corner of her mouth. Beachey was playing his game crudely.

"However"—he laid down his penholder—"that part of it is immaterial. The point is that we have the facts. I wanted to give you that crumb of consolation, since I surmised, from your failure to communicate with me, that you had—well, to put it bluntly, fallen down on the job. But don't let that disturb you, my dear. As I say, we have what we required—the 'inside dope,' you racing people would call it. And I think we can use it to advantage. I believe I can now promise you with reasonable certainty that we shall win your case."

This assurance drew no responsive gratitude from her. Her brows were drawn together, and with the tip of her finger she was drawing circles and curlicues on the arm of her chair.

"Mr. Beachey"—she lifted her bent head; there was constraint in her voice—"you know that I don't wish to seem critical or ungrateful. You have been so wonderful, so efficient in handling my affairs, so staunch and untiring that I hesitate even to raise a question. But why is this necessary—this underhand business of spying and intrigue, I mean?"

"My dear child"—he shook his head indulgently—"I only wish it were not. But a lawsuit, you must understand, is like warfare; it *is* warfare. And, to win, the successful general must have not only the heavy artillery of the law and a marshaled array of facts but must also employ strategy, tactics. He must choose as nearly as he can the conditions of battle, must feint and deploy, must know when, where and how to attack, and how to use his forces to the best advantage. He must anticipate the movements of the enemy and plan the surest method of thwarting him, must know the strength and weakness of his antagonist. And to do this he must have his scouts and spies—his intelligence service. That part of it is just as important as to have the law and the facts with you—even more so. I have seen many a weak case won through skilful management, many a strong one lost through the lack of it."

HE SAW that he had not convinced her; his eloquence was wasted. He had used all his subtlety to retain his control over her, and he was baffled and defied by some newer, stronger influence. A hatred of Jeffries bit into his blood.

"That is all right as an analogy or an abstraction," she said. "But why must the rule be applied in this specific case? I want to win it, because I think I am right; at least, you have always told me so."

"Unquestionably you are right; but——"

"Wait a minute! I know what you are going to say—that the courts so far have disagreed with us, and that we can't afford to take any risk on this final decision. Just the same, if I win, I want to win fair. If I enter one of my horses in a race, I don't try to have things fixed beforehand."

"No"—quickly—"but your trainer, if he knows his business, has a line on every horse that goes to the post with yours, its temperament and condition, whether or not its owner is out to win. He gathers every scrap of stable-gossip that he can pick up. And out of all this he formulates his instructions to his jockey and tells him just what ruses and wiles to employ. Also"—his tone was dryly significant—"allow me to remind you that this contest is somewhat more important than a horse-race."

"I know that." Her face was troubled. "You don't have to tell me what the losing would mean to me. And to you, too—a complete loss of all the time and thought and energy you have given to the case; but, Mr. Beachey, the matter seems so simple to me. Either the land is mine or it isn't. Why, then, is it necessary to go into all this—this chicanery? Why not just submit the plain issue to the Supreme Court and get a decision? Make it a horse-race?"

Beachey drew down his lean jaw and stroked it with his fingers.

"That might be all very well if it were not for the other side. But the millenium is not yet here, and I can hardly sanction such Little Red Riding-hood trustfulness—not with that bunch of wolves. Why"—watching her keenly—"they're so crooked——"

"Judge Jeffries is not crooked!" she flashed, and then reddened at her too ardent defense. Still, having committed herself, she went on bravely. "Don't tell me that a gentleman and a sportsman of his type would lend himself to this spying and jockeying."

"Judge Jeffries is an attorney," he said laconically, "and a very shrewd one—" He paused. "Since you force the remark," he went on, eying her watchfully, "I would say that it is not improbable he may have been playing the same game at Atlantic City that we were."

Her mouth twitched. Beachey was really going too far.

"You mean"—the smile still hovering about her lips, "that he was seeking my society only to find out something that would help his case?"

"Unflattering, but, I fear, true." His voice purred. "You know, my dear Constance, that I would not be making these statements without proof. That meeting at the station, now? Was it not a trifle too coincidental?"

"But that is ridiculous!" She shrugged, wondering the while how Beachey knew of the circumstance. "How could he have guessed that I would be on that train?"

"Ah!"—leaning forward, his crossed arms on the desk. "Didn't I tell you that Jeffries is shrewd? Perhaps you recall that visit of a man you suspected of being a detective at your apartment on the morning of the day you left for Atlantic City? Well, it is rather odd—isn't it?—that Jeffries, who had expected to stay over a day or two in Philadelphia, received a code-telegram which somehow changed his plans and sent him hurrying to catch the train you were on."

She stared at him, bewildered and incredulous. At last, he saw, he had succeeded in instilling suspicion into her mind.

"Then why did you allow me to stay there?" she countered. "Why did you not call me back when you learned?"

"I felt—how could I help but feel?—that your anxiety to win your suit, in addition to your more personal reasons for wishing to see him bite the dust, would make you fully a match for him, the most effective agent that I could use. Constance"—his voice deepening—"I wonder at you. Jeffries seems to have cast some kind of spell over you. You, of all women! You know what sort of man he is at rock bottom. Have you forgotten that day——"

She threw her hands out blindly.

"No! No! I haven't! I never can! Only—only, he seemed down there so different—as if he were some one else—a man I could like. Mr. Beachey"—imploringly—"help me to see things straight. I seem to be in a fog. I——"

"Look at this." He held out a sheet of paper. "A letter from our representative at Catlettsburg, advising me that there's been a man down there turning heaven and earth to get intelligence of the antecedents and present whereabouts of Caroline Logan. Who is back of that?"

She did not reply. She had snatched the letter from him and was reading it. Her face was as white as chalk. Even after she had finished she still gazed at the paper with blank eyes, and at last let it drift unnoticed from her fingers to the floor.

"Oh, what a fool I have been—what a fool!" Her voice was dull and bitter. "To dream that he was softened and, maybe, sorry—that he could ever change! Mr. Beachey"—she stretched out her hand to him—"you are, you always have been the best friend I have in the world. Will you forgive me?"

She stood up, tall and straight, her eyes glittering, her voice hard.

"Go as far as you please. Meet trick with trick. Use all your brains, your powers of resource, any and every method you choose to make him—what was it you said?—bite the dust. And, oh, let me be there to see that downfall of the mighty, to help it along if I can!"

CONSTANCE drove directly home from Beachey's office, and John Bell, just turning the corner, saw her as she stepped from the car and entered the apartment-house.

"Whew!" He whistled. "Something's sure gone wrong with the lady."

There was no especial prescience or profundity in this conjecture. Almost anybody would have made the same guess.

Her head was high; her cheeks were burning. She swept across the pavement with the swift, corruscating flash of a train of gunpowder.

Let it be said, too, that Bell's opportune presence on the spot was not premeditated. It was merely what he himself would have called, "a lucky break."

Half an hour earlier he had swung down from a sleeper in the Pennsylvania Station on his return from Kentucky, and, wishing to confirm certain rumors he had gathered on his trip, decided to visit his ally, the superintendent, before going home. He was still carrying his suitcase.

"I wonder what's up," he muttered, speculating whether it might not be wise to follow her chauffeur round to the garage and try and find out where she had been.

But in the end he concluded to do this later, if necessary; at present he would adhere to his original intention. Accordingly, he pushed ahead into the little office and, by way of greeting, held out a cigar. The superintendent eyed this offering coldly.

"I thought you said there was a piece of jack in this," he remarked.

"Now, brother"—the detective grinned deprecatingly—"you're not beginning to sweat about that, are you? We've got to deliver before we can collect."

"Well, I've done my part, haven't I? I tipped you off that she was going away." He glanced at Bell's suitcase. "Couldn't you get a line on her down there? You've had almost a month at it."

"All in good time." Bell nodded mysteriously; no necessity, as he saw it, to admit that he had been away from Atlantic City for over a week. "There's a few loose ends to be picked up yet. But we're making progress, Chief; we're making progress. And, by the way"—casually—"how does our lady friend seem since she got back from the sad sea waves? A little upset and on edge, eh?"

He ventured this as a natural deduction from what he had just seen; but the superintendent sniffed at the suggestion.

"Upset and on edge? Say; where do you get that stuff? Why, I've never seen her more good-humored. She's got a smile for everybody, no matter what happens."

"I know; I know." Bell hurriedly backed water. "I was just spoofing, of course."

Evidently, he decided, the thing that had disturbed Mrs. Lee's equanimity must be of recent occurrence. Possibly a disagreement of some kind with Jeffries, a lovers' quarrel. Or was that affair still on?

"Funny," he ruminated, seeking to draw out the superintendent, "how they will perk up when a new man comes round! There was a guy down to Atlantic City, a tall fellow——"

"Oh, him?"—readily. "Sure! 'Judge,' she calls him—Judge something or other. And he's right on the job, too—take it from me. Here to dinner the first night she got home—him and her off to the track yesterday afternoon; out together last night, and this morning there's about a cart-load of flowers come from him, so one of the maids was telling me."

Bell nodded comprehendingly, but inwardly he was puzzled. His theory of a tiff did not seem to fit. Who or what was it, then, that had so ruffled her spirits? Maybe—it's hard to figure on a woman—nothing of any significance. A lapse on the part of her dressmaker, the indifference of a salesgirl, a summons from a traffic cop. He was just about to drop the unfruitful subject and start a new line of inquiry when his glance, shifting meditatively out through the door of the office, fell upon something which gave him pause.

His field of vision took in the telephone switchboard on the other side of the lobby, and as he sat there, vainly pondering, he saw Delia cross from the elevator and speak to the operator in charge.

WHY Bell should have attached any importance to this action of the maid's was something he would not have been able to explain. His mental processes, if they had been analyzed, would probably have shown a series of hair-trigger questions: Why is she telephoning downstairs instead of from the apartment? Mrs. Lee comes in angry, and her maid immediately tries to send a message she does not wish overheard. Why? Is there any connection between the two circumstances?

But, so far as results went, that intuitive sixth sense of his merely leaped to the conclusion that here was something to be investigated. His trained experience caught in the woman's movements some suggestion of furtiveness that would have escaped the ordinary observer.

He swung quickly round so as to screen himself from Delia's recognition, should she look that way, and spoke sharply under his breath to the superintendent.

"Tip off your switchboard operator out there to plug you in on the booth." He caught up the telephone from the desk and forced it into the other's hands. "That maid, Delia, is calling somebody up, and I want to get next to what it's all about.

So compelling was his manner that the superintendent automatically complied, and the moment the order had been given, Bell seized the instrument, getting the receiver to his ear just as Delia secured her connection.

"Is this the Leigh stable?" he heard her ask. "I want to speak to Mr. DeVries."

"Don't think he'll come," some one answered. "He's busy over in the paddock."

"Go and tell him, anyhow. Say, it's Park Avenue calling. Something important."

There was a wait of four or five minutes, and then DeVries's dry, curt voice twanged over the wire.

"Well?"

"Oh, Jim dear, is that you at last? Listen; you must come to town right away. I've got to see you."

"Come to town? Drop everything here, when— Say; how do you get that way?"

"But you must come!"—excitedly. "You don't know all that's happened. Honey, everything's off between her and Jeffries. I'm sure of it from something she said. We're packing up now, going to get out to-night. She says she won't stay in New York another day. I've just got to see you."

"All right. I'll be in. Meet you at the regular place about three o'clock. Good-by—or, hold on a minute! Does Louis K. know about this?"

"Sure! She just came back from his office. But I don't think she's told him yet that she's going away."

"Where's she planning to go?"

"She don't know yet. Some place where she can hide from Jeffries until this trial is over."

"Until the trial is over?"—with a note of stronger interest. "That'll be when?"

"The last of June."

"And she's plumb off the judge all that time? Won't see him or hear from him? Say, kid"—there was a cackle in the trainer's voice—"I've got an idea. Came to me last night, but couldn't see quite how to work it. This makes it look good, though."

"You mean you might go with us?"

"No; how could I think that last night? Anyhow, if this thing that's struck me works out, I'll have my hands full."

"Oh, yes; that's you, Jim DeVries! It's always something else that counts"—tempestuously. "Not me. You don't care a darn that I'm going away. All that I'm good for is just to use, to help you out in your crooked schemes. I tell you I'm sick of it. And if——"

"Now, now, kid!" DeVries broke in placatingly. "Don't go to kicking out the stall. This idea of mine is the biggest thing we've tackled yet. You'll say so yourself when I see you and we can talk it over. There's a barrel of coin in it—real jack, not any few piking thousands. Why, kid, if we pull this off I can have a stable of my own, and you shall have a country house and diamonds and a flock of cars and sunken bathtubs and everything. We'll lead the life of Riley. Can't you stand a little separation now, when you've got all that to look forward to? Just wait till I tell you."

"We-ell"—mollified—"but how long is it going to take?"

"That's the best part of it. We'll be all cashed in before the end of June. And along about next October you'll be reading in the papers how Mr. James DeVries, the millionaire horseman, and his charming wife have left to spend the winter in Havana. But ring off now if you expect me to get to town by three o'clock. "By."

BELL held the instrument until Delia had come out of the booth and gone up-stairs. Then he set it back on the desk and gave a disappointed shrug.

"Nothing but chatter," he said, in response to the superintendent's inquiring glance. "Back-and-forth chatter between her and the trainer out at the track. And now, Chief"—as if brushing aside an unimportant interruption—"let's get down to business. How about another look for that defective wiring?"

"Nothing doing." The superintendent was emphatic. "Don't think that Delia didn't have your number the last time. What do you want to go back for, anyhow? You couldn't find anything."

"Hm. I didn't know as much then as I do now. Still, if they're suspicious, it might be just as well to wait. Delia told the trainer they were going away to-night, and that makes a difference. "I suppose"—he took a hundred-dollar bill from his wallet and smoothed it across his knee—"an inspection of those wires could be made in Mrs. Lee's absence?"

"I guess so," the superintendent assented, his eyes on the bill. "She'll probably leave her keys with me, and if she doesn't, there's always ways of getting in."

"Then we'll let it stand at that. Likely I'll drop around to-morrow, Chief." He rose and picked up his suitcase. But as he turned toward the doorway, he stopped abruptly.

"Well, look who's here!" he exclaimed; for the tall figure of Jeffries had emerged from a taxi-cab at the curb.

Again it required no especial penetration on the part of the detective to gather that something was wrong. Jeffries' preoccupation was noticeable. His mouth was a thin, grim line; there were sharp, vertical creases between his eyebrows. Walking up to the switchboard, he requested that his name be announced to Mrs. Lee.

"He's been slipped the bad news by the lady, and now he's around to try and square himself," was Bell's conclusion.

The surmise was erroneous. It was not Constance who had administered the blow Jeffries had just received, but the precise, imperturbable lawyers of the Stony Creek Coal Corporation, who, acting under orders that wound subdolously back to Perry Gabriel, told him with no waste of words that that organization had virtually washed its hands of him.

Realizing that this astounding change of front meant a reversal of all his plans, Jeffries, before going more deeply into the matter, had come at once to Constance to explain to her something of the situation and ask a postponement of the contemplated visit to Beechlands.

But the switchboard operator stolidly reported:

"Mrs. Lee asks to be excused. She can see no one this morning."

Some mistake, of course.

"I wish to speak to Mrs. Lee myself," he said curtly.

The plug was again pushed in, and his request was preferred, but only to receive a more chilling answer. Mrs. Lee was engaged and could not come to the telephone.

Incredible! Another impossible happening of an unbelievable day! He hesitated a second, and then, tossing down a coin, walked out. A fireman in overalls bulked in the office doorway.

"Chief, that sump-pump down-stairs is gone bad on us again. Cellar 'll be flooded if you don't do something pretty quick."

The superintendent rose, with a gesture of exasperation.

"Seems like everything is going wrong today," he grumbled.

"Going wrong for everybody except me," was Bell's mental comment, as he took his leave. "And, maybe, for Jim DeVries."

JEFFRIES walked across the sidewalk to his waiting cab.

"What?" He looked blankly at the driver when asked for his next destination. "Oh, drive anywhere. Round the park."

He threw himself back in the taxi and, taking off his hat, brushed his hand over his hair—the old, familiar gesture that Constance had noted in the Atlantic City omnibus. Then it had expressed something of bewilderment at the emotions she had roused in him; now it also expressed bewildered emotion, but of a far different character.

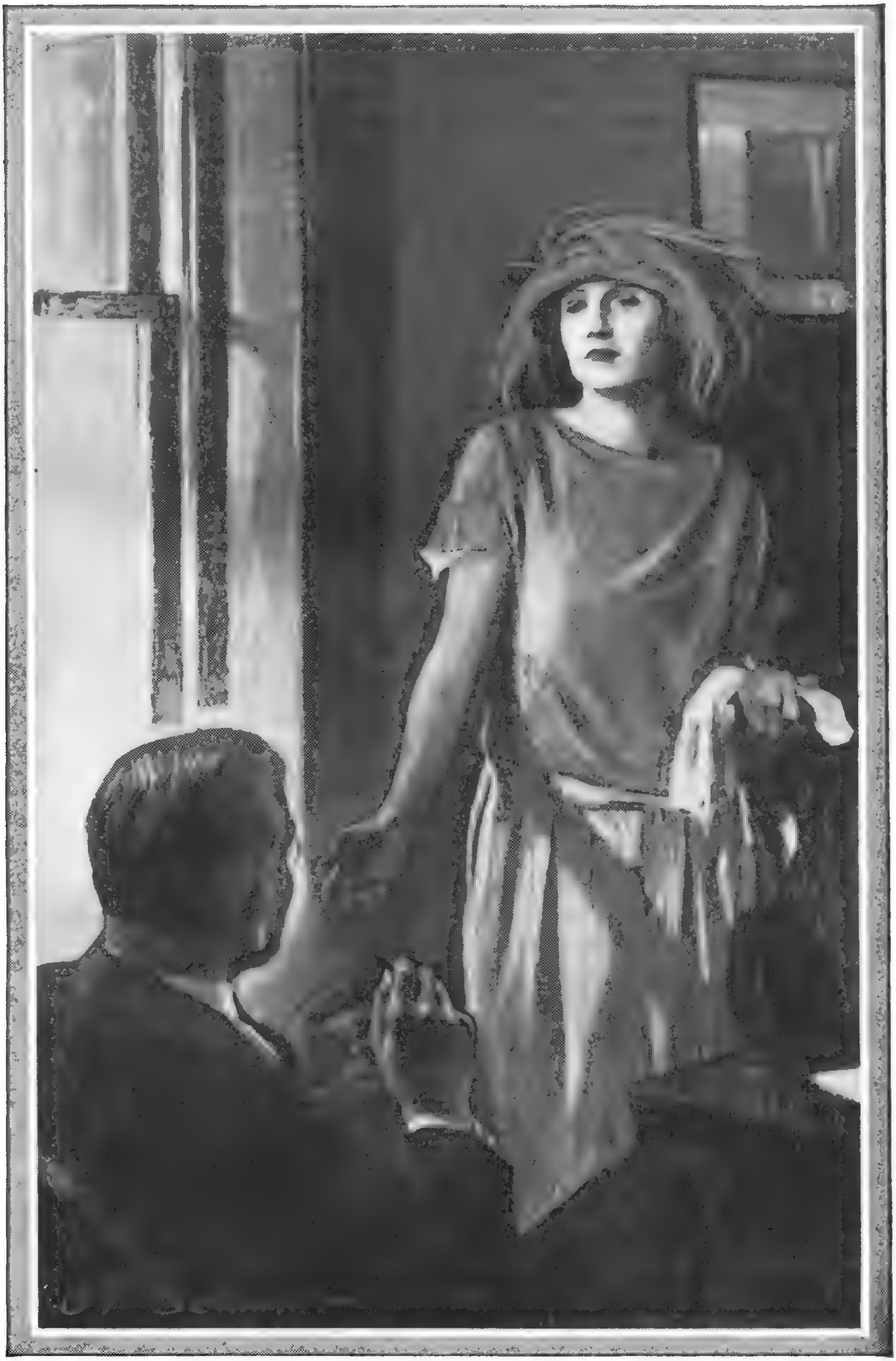
The rebuff was so unexpected, her refusal even to speak to him over the telephone so unlike her, that, after the first smarting hurt of it was over, he began to speculate as to the cause of it, to wonder in what way he could possibly have offended her.

The remembrance of the sweetness of her eyes when they had parted the night before, the sweetness of her voice when she had promised to visit him at Beechlands was like salt on a wound. There had been no shadow between them then.

What could have happened overnight, or even this morning, to change so her attitude toward him? He searched his mind for some sin either of omission or commission; but his conscience acquitted him.

Sudenly he thought of Nannie Wendell. She, if any one, might be able to give some clue to the enigma. So he tapped on the window of the cab and gave the driver the number of her house.

Fortunately for his shaken poise he found



She stood up, tall and straight, her eyes glittering, her voice hard. "Go as far as you please. Use any and every method you choose to make him—what was it you said?—bite the dust."

her at home and alone; but after he had explained the incident to her, she was unable, in spite of her voluble sympathy, to supply any solution to the problem.

"It isn't a bit like her," she said. "Probably some airiness of Delia's that Connie knows nothing about. She gives that hussy too free a rein, anyway. Just drop that I'm-at-my-grandmother's-funeral expression of yours, Clay honey, and I'll get her on the telephone and have the whole thing cleared up before you know it."

She rang; but Dolby, the butler, answered. Mrs. Lee, he said, was indisposed—suffering with a bad headache—and had given orders that she was not to be disturbed.

"Lying, of course," Nannie scoffed, turning to Clay. "She ought to know better than to think she can try that on me. I'll tell you what we'll do, old dear. I'm tied up this afternoon, or I'd go over with you right now and see what it's all about. It's Connie herself, plain enough, and not Delia, and something serious must have come up to set her against both of us. If she were really ill she would have sent for me at once, and headaches are unknown to her except as excuses. But you come up to dinner, and afterward we'll go over there and storm the place. I'll get to her if I have to batter down the doors to do it."

She spoke with such confident assurance that Jeffries felt he might safely leave the situation in her hands, and so, with many protestations of gratitude, he departed to put in a tedious, dragging afternoon, staring out of a club window and pondering over the free way in which Fate had used her poignard on him. Two vital thrusts in one day was certainly going it strong.

The defection on the part of the coal corporation, and Constance's inexplicable behavior! Over and over again he circled through the round of futile questions, first in regard to one and then the other; but found no adequate answer to either.

HE WAS too early in his arrival at Nannie's home, and dinner with Hugo, who was a talkative host, seemed interminable. But at last it was over, and he and Nannie were at the door of the Park Avenue apartment-house.

"We won't bother to have ourselves announced," Nannie told him. "Just go up and walk in on her and ask her what t'ell. She'll be at home, all right—probably bawling her eyes out. Come on!" She led the way toward the elevator.

But the uniformed West Indian at the door of the car did not step aside at their approach.

"Don't tell me that Mrs. Lee isn't in, Jasper." Nannie spoke sharply. "She will see me."

The negro goggled his eyes at her.

"Didn't Mrs. Lee infarm you that she was leaving town, ma'am?"

"Leaving town?" Nannie and Jeffries exclaimed together.

"Yes, sare. Yes, Mistress Wendell. She took her departure not more than half an hour ago."

"Where did she go?"

"That I cannot infarm you, ma'am. She did not confide her destination."

Nannie looked at Jeffries.

"Wait here a minute, Clay. I'll just run up and get the straight of this."

But again the elevator-man stopped her.

"It would be unproductive, Mistress Wendell. The servants have all left, too. The apartment is quite depopulated."

She ran across the hall to the switchboard operator, but only to have the amazing news confirmed. Mrs. Lee had gone away that evening and had left no address. All letters or messages were to be forwarded to her attorney, Mr. Beachey. Neither had she said how long she would be gone, but it was probably for some time, as she had dismissed all her servants except Delia, who accompanied her.

Nannie Wendell was speechless for a moment.

"Well, of all the—" she gasped. But Jeffries already had her by the arm and was hurrying her toward the door.

"You go to the Grand Central Station." He thrust her into her limousine. "I'll look for her at the Pennsylvania and come back to meet you."

But he knew that the quest was futile, even when he proposed it. So he was not surprised by Nannie's shake of the head when he rejoined her three-quarters of an hour later.

"If only I had passed up that rotten bridge this afternoon!" she wailed, stricken by the sight of his drawn face. "If only— But who would ever have dreamed of her doing anything so absolutely senseless?"

Jeffries made no answer; but Nannie realized that she was receiving the usual reward of the Good Samaritan, blamed as a meddlesome bungler for her well-meant offices.

He maintained his air of cold restraint throughout the drive home, but Nannie's mercurial spirits could not long stay repressed.

"Pouf!" she exclaimed, as he left her at the door. "What's the use of making it a tragedy, Clay? Don't ask me why she has done it or what her game is; I'm as much at sea as you are. But she'll be back. Take my word for it—she doesn't want to shake you any more than you want to shake her. She's only trying to be mysterious or romantic or something. So driveling! She knows too much of the world and of men, too, to pull such a piece of flapper coquetry. 'Leave her alone and she'll come home.' And the less fuss you kick up the quicker she'll be about it."

Excellent advice, but Jeffries was hardly in the mood to follow it. Instead, he went to his hotel and poured out his soul in a letter ten pages long, which he posted to Constance in care of Beachey.

THREE days passed, four, five, six, a week. And still no answer. Neither could he through his own inquiries or those of Nannie discover the slightest trace of her. So far as New York was concerned, Constance Lee seemed simply to have dropped off the earth.

Jeffries was too unsettled to attend to business, too harassed and perplexed to enjoy the amusements in which his cousin tried to engross him. His affairs were in a muddle; his heart was in chaos.

Then, one morning, DeVries telephoned him that the colt, Sleighbells, had arrived, and he decided to go out to the track. He had already sounded the trainer without results as to the whereabouts of Mrs. Lee, but it struck him that if DeVries really knew, this might be a chance to win him to a more communicative humor.

DeVries was not at the barn when Jeffries arrived, and Clay sat down on a bench outside to wait for him.

As he lounged in the sunshine, Perry Gabriel, in a motor-coat and cap, with John Bell at his side, strolled slowly down the line of stables. They, too, had come out to question DeVries concerning the absence of his employer, and they stopped a few feet away from Jeffries.

Gabriel, with a supercilious glance at Clay, waved his hand toward the row of box stalls.

"There's where some of the money went that she blackmailed me out of." He raised his voice for Jeffries's benefit. "This is her string of horses, and a damn poor lot, if anybody should ask you. They tell me she paid twenty thousand dollars for Joybells. Ain't it always that way? The smoother the crook the bigger the sucker. And little Constance is no exception to the rule."

Jeffries' spring to his feet was as light as that of a cat. He reached Gabriel in a step.

"I don't know you, sir," he said in a low voice; "and I never will know you. But I don't like the color of your hair, your philosophy of life, your manners, morals, your eyes or your necktie. I don't like anything about you, especially the sound of your voice. I'd advise you to keep it between your teeth from now on; for if I ever hear of you slandering a woman again, I'll travel a thousand miles to break you square in two."

Gabriel turned a sickly yellow, but felt secure enough in Bell's company to indulge in insolence.

"It's Judge Clay Jeffries, of Kentucky, I believe," he drawled. "Well, I'm Perry Gabriel, if you want to know, and I'll say what I please about Constance Lee, the dirty little high-jacking—" He finished with an explosive, "Oof!" for Jeffries knocked him down.

Gabriel scrambled up and, hurriedly sheltering himself behind Bell, glared poisonously at Clay.

"You poor fish!" he gibbered. "Where do you get off? She pumped you inside out at Atlantic City, and on the strength of what she found out queered you with the coal corporation and then gave you the gate. Here, Bell"—wildly—"hold the crazy come-on off until I tell him who the lady of his dreams really is—the ex-convict and adventuress, Caroline Logan!"

What has become of Constance Lee? The next instalment of "Thoroughbred" contains some very interesting developments. See September EVERYBODY'S—out August 15th.

Mescal

A Story of Spanish Love and Spanish Hate. There's a World of Difference between Them and the Diluted Emotions Which Anglo-Saxons Call by Those Names

By George E. Holt

ALL day we had ridden, Rodriguez and I, along a disreputable trail which twisted like a snake-track along the foot-hills of the Sierra Madre down the peninsula of Baja California. At daylight we had left the village of San Vicente, with its seven 'dobe houses, and struck south. Sunset was at hand, and the hour for making camp among the wild and uninhabited hills. To-morrow, at dawn, the trail again—the trail that led to a cañon of which I had heard, where, it was said, the free gold——

A little bare spot surrounded by mescal, at the foot of a great outcrop of dark stone, caught my eye, and I called the attention of Rodriguez to it as a place to spend the night.

A silent, savage-faced man was Rodriguez, but the best guide south of the border. From him I expected scant courtesy—but much wisdom. He cast an eye at the spot and put a spur to his horse's belly.

"Not there! *Por Dios*, not there!" he said. "The mescal!"

I thought this queer. All day we had been riding through the ponderous thorned mescal, which begins life as a gigantic-leafed pineapple, with steel-hard thorns on tip and edge of every spreading inch-thick leaf, and ends it after sending heavenward a flower-frond like a Gargantuan asparagus-tip, twice as high as a tall man's head, thick as a boy's neck, and armed like an ancient spear.

All about us the young mescal claimed the earth, to the exclusion of every growing thing except the cacti, and all about us marched, like a straggling army, the tall flower-fronds.

But what had they to do—except by their absence from a little space—with camp-sites?

I followed Rodriguez, puzzled. Within a mile he pulled up and pointed a brown forefinger.

"Good place for to sleep," he said. "*Muy bueno.*"

"All right; suits me," I answered him. "But what was the matter with the other place?"

"Mescal," answered Rodriguez. "In the daytime all right. At night—no!" And he proceeded toward the spot he had selected.

Now, this added to the mystery of the matter, for, so far as I knew, there was nothing more dangerous connected with mescal, either by night or by day, than the possibility of working a month's injury to oneself upon the ironlike thorns. If there *were* any other danger, it seemed to me that I should know it. Wherefore, after our supper had been eaten and Rodriguez and I sat smoking beside our little camp-fire, I looked at him and again asked him what he had meant.

His eyes dropped and he tried to laugh the matter off, but there was that in his manner which still further increased my interest. I said, to rouse him:

"And the best guide in Baja California is—afraid. And of mescal!"

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I succeeded in my effort.

"Mother of God!" he cried. "You—you know not what you talk of. You—you——"

He stumbled over his words and fell to speaking in Spanish.

"Listen," he said, "and I will tell you that which you do not know. And look—look!"

He raised his chin, and I saw, under the jaw and spreading down the brown throat, a great dead-white scar.

"Ha! It makes you cold—inside. And now I shall tell you why I do not like to waken in the night and to see the great tree-trunks of mescal.

"I WAS younger than you—yes; by five years, when Lolita—Lolita Salazar—and I loved each other. Very much we loved each other. Her father was a poor man, and I was poor also, but love made Lolita and I both rich. Since we were children had we loved each other, and always we had talked of the some day when we should have a 'dobe house of our own, with chickens and pigs, and some dogs—to play with the children.

"Came a time, when Lolita was only seventeen, that she came to me crying—oh, very hard. And I asked why she cried, and she told me that her father was going to make her marry Felipe Abañez. Now, as God knows, I thought this was a joke, for Felipe Abañez was twice, three times as old as Lolita. And so I told Lolita it was a joke of her father, and led her back to her house, and told her father that he must not joke with her in that way. But it was no joke after all, and her father told me so. Also he told me that Felipe Abañez was rich, and that I would never own even a 'dobe house.

"Then I think I went mad for a little while, because I tried to kill her father. Lolita kept me from doing it, whereupon I became angry with Lolita also, and jumped upon a horse and rode away. Into the hills I rode, and at last found the cabin of a friend, and there I stayed for a month, two months—trying to forget.

"But one day it came to me that this was no man's way, and so I got on my horse and rode back to my village. It was night when I got there, and one house was all lighted, and there was music there, while all the other houses were dark. The house where the lights and music were was the house of Lolita's father.

"And so I knew that I had come back on her marriage-night.

"Now, of course all the village was at the wedding *fiesta*, and so I was not noticed. I rode my horse up to the back of the house, and in the shadows I waited. Pretty soon came Manuel, the little brother of Lolita. I seized him by the arm, and he was afraid for a little while. But he knew I would not hurt him, and he liked me better than he did Felipe Abañez.

" 'Is Lolita already married?' I asked him.

" 'No; she is not married,' he told me—at which something began to burn in my heart. 'She lies upon her bed and weeps,' he said.

"And then the flame in my heart grew very hot.

" 'Tell her, quickly—and tell no one else—that Pedro Rodriguez waits for her behind the house. Go quickly!' And I gave him a little push.

"*Madre de Dios!* It seemed only a minute before Lolita, in her white wedding-dress, came out of the back door of the house and to the place where I waited. Then she started to call my name, but before she could say it she was in my arms. And after one kiss—but what a kiss that was!—I raised her behind me upon my horse, and we went swiftly, leaving behind us the lights and music and—Felipe Abañez. Ah, I was *hombre* in those days—and there was fire in my veins instead of cold blood!

"But Felipe Abañez was rich, and the rich are always powerful. He and his friends caught us the next night—we rode into a trap they had set. When the men sprang toward us and Lolita saw what it was, 'Kill me, Pedro; kill me now!' she cried, and handed me the knife which she drew from my belt. But I emptied my pistol at them first, but they were ten to one. 'Kill me if you love me!' cried Lolita again. And then——

" 'Well, then I tried to go with Lolita, but I was too late. They tied me and we rode back toward the village, and on the way we met Felipe Abañez, who laughed like a madman when he saw me—and even more when he saw what one horseman carried.

"There was a new moon—even as to-night, *señor*—and Lolita's face was very white in the moonlight.

"But Felipe Abañez did not take me back to the village. He led the way to a place where the land was covered with great mescal—mescal which had sent its middle stalk up three, four, five feet, getting ready to bloom, just as it now is. These stalks were as high, almost, as my head, and as big through as a fence-post, with a thorn-tip like a steel needle. Felipe Abañez selected one of these great plants of which the thorn-tip came just against the under part of my jaw—when my head was thrown back. To that plant he himself tied me, so that I could not move.

"Then they rode away, and they laughed back at me.

"Now, *señor*, you know perhaps that the mescal-stalk grows, at certain times and in certain places, as much as four inches in a night. That was the thing they left me to think about—in the moonlight. It was not pleasant. I think the moonlight made it worse also. By morning the body of Pedro Rodriguez would be raised from the ground—and the mescal-spike would have forced its way——

"I struggled with the cords they had tied me with, but they were rawhide, and I could neither break nor untie them. I tried to climb up on the spreading base-leaves of the mescal, and hardly felt the great thorns which tore my feet and legs and poisoned them as well. But the effort was useless. Then I tried to turn my head—to throw it back far enough to escape the thorn—but I was tied too tightly to the stalk. Also, I tried to overturn the great plant—but I might as well have pushed against a cathedral wall. All it did was to sway a trifle and thrust the thorn a little ways into my jaw.

"Thus I worked for an hour before I grew silent with despair, and hung there, in the ghastly moonlight, upon a plant that I could *feel* growing. You have never felt such a thing, *señor*—a growing plant. It seemed to live, to have a heart-beat. No doubt it was my own heart beating. And—after a while the back of my neck began to hurt most terribly. Then I knew that the mescal had grown and that my neck ached because I had thrown my head further and further back—to escape the spike beneath my jaw. And I knew that my head could go no further back—that now the deadly spike would push its way through my jaw, and then my tongue, and then—I judged that I should not live till morning.

"And so, in the moonlight, I hung, and felt that great mescal stalk growing—growing—in my arms—

"I became unconscious—perhaps from pain—I do not know. Manuel, the little brother of Lolita, had followed Felipe Abañez and found me. He cut the rawhides and watched until my mind came back. Then I sent him home—and in a little while I followed him.

"And after I had killed Felipe Abañez I came back into the hills. That is the story, *señor*. Now let us sleep."

Enter Craig Kennedy

NEITHER age, sex nor condition render one immune to detective stories—stories with thrills. And since EVERYBODY'S tries to have the best, and since Craig Kennedy ranks with Sherlock Holmes as a fictional detective, we have arranged with his creator, Arthur B. Reeve, for a series of new Craig Kennedy stories. The first, "Thicker Than Water," will appear in—

September *EVERYBODY'S*—out August 15th

Out of Bondage

No Rôle Is More to the Major's Taste Than Robin Hood. This Time He Plays Deliverer to Some Unfortunates, and Deals Jocular Justice to Their Oppressors

By L. Patrick Greene

EVERY one who knows South Africa knows Veldtsdorp. It is typical of the numerous mushroom townships which are scattered about the veld, and which owe their existence to the discovery of gold or diamonds in the vicinity.

"Veldtsdorp" and "diamonds" are almost synonymous terms. When you think of one, you think of the other. Fortunes are made there between sunrise and sunset, and lost in the various saloons overnight.

It has its share of lawbreakers, has Veldtsdorp, for crooks, as well as honest men, gravitate to places where money is easily made.

Among the lawbreakers present and known—"deucedly well known," as he put it—to the police at this time was the major.

The major—the man who had for many years been the despair of the diamond-mining syndicate, the man whom the police were continually trying to catch in the act of buying illicitly procured diamonds. And they seemed doomed to perpetual failure. They knew the major was an illicit diamond-buyer—he airily admitted it—yet they could not prove it. But they never gave up trying.

And so, when Trooper Cox, of the Mounted, saw a slim-waisted, elegantly attired man lounging on the grass near the native compound of one of the large mines, he at once rode up to investigate.

"Hello, Major! What are you doing here?" he said, as he dismounted.

The major looked rather peeved.

"I don't like the suspicious tone of your voice," he replied.

"Well, I like that! Haven't I the right to be suspicious?" Cox answered, with some heat. He was very young and self-conscious. "When an I. D. B. suspect hangs round the native compound of a diamond mine, that's enough to make any one suspicious."

The major's round, smooth-shaven face lighted up with a smile—a disarming smile, the smile of a frank, ingenuous, man.

"Dear old top," he drawled, "you chappies do run true to form; don't you? Here you've only been six months in the corps, and——"

"Nine months!" snapped Cox.

"My mistake—sorry! Nine months in the corps, and you're just as suspicious as old Sergeant-Major Hough. Well"—resignedly—"I suppose you want to search me." He rose lazily to his feet and held his hands above his head.

But Cox made no move. The major's eyebrows arched in surprise.

"Why don't you search me?"

"I'm not going to."

The major stroked his jaw meditatively. His gray eyes opened wider; he appeared puzzled. Then he chuckled softly.

"Ah! I have it. You're afraid you'll find a scorpion in my pocket. But you won't—really! 'Pon my word of honor and all that. But perhaps you're thinking of Simkins. You haven't heard about him? You astonish me, really. It was very funny.

"Simkins, you know, wanted to make me a present of a diamond—the dear old boy wanted it to be a surprise, I believe. Anyhow, he tried to put it in my pockets when I wasn't looking, but little Johnny Scorpion was—oh, my, yes!—and Simkins took his hand out again in such a hurry that he forgot to let go of the diamond. And the scorpion liked him very much—wouldn't be parted from him, in fact."

The major, somewhat breathless, paused. He seemed to expect some comment from Cox, and getting none, continued:

"I say, old dear; I wish you wouldn't stare at me like that. It's bally embarrassing and—er—damned bad form, if I may say so. Something is troubling the old bean, perhaps?"

"I was just wondering how you knew Simkins was going to frame you, Major."

"Going to *try*, you mean," amended the other. "I don't know—'pon my soul I don't. Perhaps—er—the scorpion told me. He was an affectionate little beggar, and very pointed in his remarks. I hated to lose him. But to the question on hand—I talk quite a lot; don't I?"

"Yes. And say nothing."

"You misjudge me, dear boy. But so have many better men. And so you don't want to search me?"

"No," Cox said slowly. "Even if I found the diamonds on you *now*, they'd be bits of glass or alum before I got you to the station."

"Or they might just vanish," the major murmured softly. "But there you go, accusing me of witchcraft. Really, this is too much!"

"No," continued Cox, ignoring the major's levity; "I just want to know why you're hanging round here."

"The view's delightful."

The major indicated, with a wide sweep of his arm, the level plain, ugly in its bareness, beyond the town. Cox snorted.

"It's no place for a white man who's keeping within the law."

"The man declaims riddles," purred the major. "Meaning?"

"That native laborers sometimes manage to smuggle diamonds from the mines and sell them to degenerate white men."

"Ugh! Meaning that's my game?"

"Well, isn't it?"

"Not very complimentary, are you? And if that *was* my game, do you think I'd play it out here, where any passer-by could see me?"

"You might. Being so in the open, it wouldn't occur to any one to suspect."

"But *you* did."

"Yes, I did," Cox agreed complacently.

"How very clever! And of course you'll stand beside me now and watch the native come up to me and sell me the diamond. Then you'll arrest me. I don't see why you wait here, though. Why not send me an engraved invitation to appear at the police station with the diamond in my possession? It 'd save you no end of time and trouble. Still, your idea's clever—frightfully clever. You'll get promoted for this, old dear; they ought to give you a commission. If my recommendation is worth anything, they will."

COX flushed crimson. He knew that he had acted like a fool. He should not have approached the major at all, but should have hidden in a near-by hut. Perhaps it was not yet too late. He could ride away, and then——

The major's bantering voice broke in on his cogitations.

"You've made me feel very uncomfortable, Cox. I shall feel as if some one is spying on me all the rest of the afternoon. Even if you rode away now, I should still feel that you were watching me." He sighed. "It's silly of me to be so sensitive, but it's bally hard to be wrongfully suspected—specially when I'm on such an innocent errand."

"Just what is your errand, Major?"

"My native servant, Jim—he's a Hottentot, you know—is visiting some friends in the compound, and I'm waiting for him. If I don't, some degenerate white man will fill him up with rot-gut whisky at two shillings a drink, and then some other degenerate white men will arrest him."

Cox sat down on the sun-bleached grass.

"That settles it," he said in decided tones, answering the major's look of surprised inquiry. "I'll wait here for Jim, too. When he does come, I'll search *him*."

The major made a gesture of resignation and sat down beside the policeman.

"Very well. I'll be glad of company. A chap gets frightfully lonely out here—Ah! Here comes Jim now. Do you mind, dear sir"—the major was mildly sarcastic—"getting through your searching party as quickly as possible? It's getting late, and I'm most deucedly hungry."

By this time Jim, a squat, ugly Hottentot, had come up to where the two men were sitting.

Cox looked at him searchingly and smiled contemptuously at the native's attire—evidently the major's cast-off garments. Save across the shoulders, they were ludicrously too large.

"Dress him like a white man, don't you, Major?" Cox scoffed.

The major's eyes narrowed, but he made no reply.

"Here you boy, Jim!" Cox continued. "Don't *wena* know how to boss up before a white man. *Susa lo* hat! Quick! Before *mena sjambok wena*." The policeman rose to his feet and raised his hand threateningly.

"I think he was born in that hat," murmured the major. "I know he sleeps in it. And I don't think I'd threaten to beat him if I were you. I don't like that sort of thing—really, I don't."

Jim, in response to an almost imperceptible nod, snatched his hat—a battered and greasy felt, creased in the middle—from his head and threw it on the ground.

"Pardon, *baas*," he said. "Yah, *baas?*"

Cox's answer was to examine Jim from head to foot. He made the Hottentot discard his garments and searched them one by one. He looked up Jim's nose, in his ears, in his mouth—not a wrinkle of Jim's body was left unexplored. But his search was a vain one.

"All right," he growled at length, and, turning away in disgust, mounted his horse and galloped swiftly townward.

"Dress quickly, Jim," the major ordered. "We trek to-night."

"Yah, *bass*."

"I am tired of this place. It has too many eyes."

"Yah, baas. See everything—see nothing. That *nonquai*" (mounted policeman) "his eyes closed. Me—damned glad—golly, yes."

An hour later, after they had reached their camp on the veld and the major was smoking his pipe with that contentment which comes to a man after a good meal, Jim said softly,

"Does the *baas* want to see it now?"

"Aye, Jim," the major replied absently.

For the second—no; the third time that day Jim took the battered felt hat from his head.

In the cleft of the crown—holding it in shape—was a lump of fat. Nearly all the natives wearing that style of head-gear which Jim favored used similar pieces of fat to retain the fashion-prescribed cleft.

Jim removed the fat and from it extracted a smooth pebble. This he wiped carefully on the tail of his coat and then handed it to the major.

"It is well that the policeman did not pick up the hat," the major commented.

Jim grinned.

"It is an old hat, *baas*, and all covered with grease. Why should a white man be interested in Jim's hat?"

The major toyed with the pebble in his hand.

"This makes twenty, Jim," he said. "Twice the count of your two hands."

"I can get more if the *baas*——"

"No. This is enough. Get ready—we trek when the moon rises."

"Where do we go, *baas?*"

"What matters? Which way blows the wind, Jim?"

"East, *baas*."

"Then we trek east."

IT WAS nearing sunset of the following day when Jim halted the four mules which drew the light Cape cart, in the scanty shade afforded by a stunted tree.

"Shall we outspan here, *baas?*" he asked.

"Aye, Jim. It is as good a place as any."

In an incredibly short space of time Jim unhitched and unharnessed the mules, hobbled them and turned them loose to snatch what food they could from the withered herbage, had erected the bell-tent, set up the major's deck-chair and portable table, and then—when he saw that his *baas* was comfortably settled—lit a fire and set about preparing the evening meal. He worked swiftly. A model of efficiency, he made no waste motions.

It was an interesting comradeship, this which existed between the superdandified but very masculine white man and the Hottentot. There was something about it infinitely deeper than the relationship between an indulgent master and a devoted servant. Perhaps the eternal boy, so strong in both, the aversion each bore to the conventional ways of their respective peoples drew them together. And there was a mutual admiration of the essentials of manhood which were so strong in each; they had tested each other time and again.

And yet, despite this unity of thought and aim, the major was always the "*baas*," the white man, the supreme creation.

And Jim—well, Jim was Jim. There was no other like him. He had forsaken his people—the ease of kraal life—in order that he might follow his *baas*—his *baas* who could do no wrong, his *baas* who could do all things and do them well.

It was the Hottentot's greatest joy, the time of his proudest moments, when he could declaim to a circle of mouth-open natives, "He is the major, and I—I am Jim, his servant."

He looked up now from his task at the camp-fire.

"Some one comes, *baas*," he said.

"Where, Jim?"

The Hottentot rose to his feet and pointed toward the setting sun. The major rose, too, and, shading his eyes, scanned the veld to the west.

"I can see no one, Jim," he said, and resumed his seat.

The Hottentot chuckled. It was always a source of merriment to him that his *baas*, in all things else so clever, should fail to see the things and hear the things which were so plain to him. And yet there were few white men who were so well versed in veld-lore as the major.

"A man comes on horseback, *baas*," Jim continued. "He rides fast this way."

"You're a bally miracle-man," the major drawled in English.

"Oah, yah, *baas*. A mirle-man. Damme, no."

The major laughed.

"When will he get here, Jim?" His voice was now sharp and incisive. Only when he spoke English and was concentrating on some plan of action did the major drawl.

"By the time scoff is ready for the *baas*."

"Then set the table for two, Jim."

HALF an hour later a heavily bearded man rode up to the tent, dismounted and stood looking at the major in dumfounded astonishment.

"What the hell—" he ejaculated. Then: "Haw! Haw!"

The major, not at all conscious of the incongruous figure he presented—a man in dinner clothes on the veld—looked up with a bland smile and adjusted his monocle.

"You're just in time, old chap," he said. "Let my servant take your horse, and then we'll have dinner. Sit down; won't you?"

He indicated the chair which the Hottentot had placed on the opposite side of the table.

Still speechless, the man slumped down in the chair. On his face was a comical expression of bewilderment. He seemed to be moving as one in a dream, and gingerly fingered the silverware.

"S'welp me!" he muttered, and, "Strike me pink if this ain't a one-er!"

"My name's Aubrey St. John," the major hinted.

The man looked up quickly—noted the major's carefully brushed hair, his manicured nails, his smooth-shaven face, the monocle and his polished pumps.

"You look it," he said briefly. "My name's Smith. Bill Smith—'Bruiser' Smith, some folks call me."

"You look it," the major said pleasantly.

Smith glared truculently, seemed about to take offense, then changed his mind, swallowed hard, half choked, muttered something under his breath about "swell dudes tryin' to poke fun at a bloke. I'm a good mind to biff 'im one," and then resorted, in his confused embarrassment, to fingering the silverware once again.

The major clapped his hands, and Jim, wearing a white-flannel shirt and white-duck trousers supported at the waist by a flaming red cumerbund, brought on the first course.

Smith ate noisily, but otherwise the meal was a silent one, broken only by the major's softly voiced orders to Jim.

"I do not indulge in sweets," the major said, when Smith looked up from the carcass of a pheasant, with a sigh of satisfaction, "but Jim will open a tin of fruit if you wish."

Smith wiped his greasy fingers on the table-cloth.

"Naw! I don't want none. That was a meal wot is a meal, Aubrey. I don't want to spoil it."

"A cigarette, then?"

"Thanks!" He lit it and, leaning back, his gnarled hands clasped at the back of his head, puffed contentedly.

"Nothin' like a fag to settle a man's stummick after a big meal," he said. "I wouldn't call the king me uncle now, guv'nor."

"I'm sure he reciprocates your sentiments."

Smith snorted.

"You're pokin' fun at me again; ain't you, mister?" He ignored the major's expostulations and continued: "But go on—we don't tork the same languige, so I don't understand—a bloke wot blows me to a meal like that can pull my bleedin' leg all he's a mind to. S'welp me, I ain't 'ad such a blowout since I took my missus down to Brighton fer a day's houting. We 'ad fish an' chips an' winkles then. Next day I sailed fer this Gawd-forsaken country, and 'eaven knows when I'll see the old gal again."

"The missus? The old gal?" the major repeated softly. "Your wife, you mean?"

"Yus. Lumme, she's a daisy! The best pal a covey ever 'ad. She wasn't no city gal—came from the country, she did—was a 'ousemaid in one of the big Lunnon 'ouses. Dressed and torked like a lady, she did. Then she married me, an' we lived down W'itechapel way."

"In the slums, eh? And she a country girl?"

"Yus. Lumme, but love's a funny thing; ain't it, Aubrey?"

The two men smoked for a while in silence, then,

"Didn't she want to go back to the country, Smith?"

"Lor lumme, yes! But wot could I do? There ain't no jobs fer such as me in the country. Now, Lunnon I know. I used ter work be'ind a bar, I did—tap-room man I was. I used to make as 'igh as three shillin's a day w'en trade was good. I used ter buy 'er a bunch of vi'lets days I was specially lucky. I wouldn't 'ave been any good in the country; would I?"

His voice held a note of appeal. The major nodded sympathetically.

"But she wasn't satisfied?"

"She was until the brat came. Then she 'ad to go. Went to live with 'er folks, she did, and wouldn't come back to our plice in W'itechapel. She said it was no plice fer a kid. But, lumme, I was raised there, guv'nor, and I'm all right."

"Yes. You're all right. And so——"

"An' so—lumme, I seem ter be a-tellin' of you everythin'; don't I? An' so I sees it's hup ter me to get a plice fer us in the country—a little pub, maybe. You know the kind I mean. Wiv a thatched roof, an' chickens and ducks in the back yard. An' may be roses and bloomin' vi'lets climbin' up the walls. But a plice like that costs money—as much as two hundred jimmy-o-goblins, most like. An' where was I goin' to get two hundred pounds? An' then I 'ears as 'ow a man wot can serve nippy-like be'ind a bar could get good money hout 'ere—an' hout I comes. Worked my blinkin' passage over."

"And you got a good job?"

"Yus, I did. Like 'ell I did!" The man's voice was full of self-contempt. "Do you know Jake Shiners, guv'nor?"

The major shook his head.

"Well, if you ever meets up with 'im, remember that Bruiser Smith warned yeh to look out fer 'im. He's a sly devil; he's a lousy—" Smith's voice shook with suppressed hate.

The sun had long since set.

"We'll have a light," said the major.

There was something about Smith which interested him. He wanted to know more. He sensed the romance and the tragedy which had come into the man's life.

"Bring candles, Jim," he ordered softly.

A GHOSTLIKE figure emerged from the darkness beyond the fire, entered the tent, and a moment later set two candles, in sticks of polished silver, on the table. They did not flicker, so still was the night air, but burned steadily.

"You were speaking of Shiners," prompted the major.

Smith roused himself with a start.

"He hired me at Cape Town the day I landed. I was green, an' soaked in his oily talk. It sounded on the square with me; I thought 'e was a little bit of all right. 'E looked like a real gent to me. I ought ter 'ave known better, 'owever, w'en I saw the way men treated 'im down there an' on the way hup. 'Asn't got any friends, Jake 'asn't. Do you know Peterstown, guv'nor?"

"Peterstown? Let me see. Isn't that

the place where they had a big gold boom a few years back?"

"Yus. That's the place. It ought ter be called 'Shinerstown.' Jake owns it—body and soul. The mining coveys there tork about another boom comin', but, lumme, it ain't never stopped boomin' fer Jake. Them coveys in Peterstown get a goodish bit of dust from the old workin's, but it ain't their'n. It's Jake's. The only way they can get food—an' some of 'em 'as wives and kids—is to buy it from Jake. An' w'en they're broke, which is most frequent, 'e let's 'em 'ave credit; but the interest 'e charges would make a two-'undred-percenter Whitechapel Jew dream of 'oly 'eaven."

"Why don't they get out of the place?"

" 'Ow can they, guv'nor? Everything they own is mortgaged to Jake. 'E owns the shirts on their backs, the grub wot goes into their bellies. An', besides, Peterstown 's a good seventy miles—bleedin,' thirsty, 'ot miles—from anyw'ere; an' they ain't none of 'em got no trekkin' outfit. So they stays out, prayin' like bleedin' 'ell fer a big strike."

"But you have a horse?"

"I 'ave an' I 'aven't, in a manner o' speakin'." Smith smiled.

"You mean?"

"This 'orse"—he jerked his thumb behind him—"ain't mine. It's Jake's. I 'ooked 'im. Stole 'im, if yeh like. See? 'Ere's the lay of the game: I've been workin' a year fer Jake. A year at twenty quid a month an' board—that's wot 'e promised me. An' I asked 'im to take care of it fer me, for, thinks I, if I 'ave it, I'll spend it—thinkin,' I does, to surprise my missus wiv a lot—all at once like; thinkin' I'd be able to go 'ome at the end of the year an' buy that little pub in the country; thinkin'—aw! Wot a bleedin' fool I was! I 'ad no business ter think; it ain't safe ter think w'en ye're dealin' wiv a chap like Jake. An' then, w'en I asks 'im fer my pay—last week, it was—'e laughs at me an' gives me five quid—five lousy quid fer a year's work! The rest, 'e said, I'd 'ad in keep—the blighter!

"An' wot could I do but swaller 'ard an' take it wiv a smile. Jake 'e's big enough to take me up in one 'and an' throw me across the bar. And so, night afore last, I 'elps myself to wot's in the till an' rides off on Jake's 'orse. And wasn't I within my rights, guv'nor?"

The major nodded absently.

"I thought," Smith continued, "as 'ow I could reach the railway an' be on my way to the Cape afore sundown to-night. But I got lost; I ain't no good on the veld. An' now it's too late. Jake'll be after me in the mornin', an' 'e'll get me."

Smith shivered, and for the first time his air of assurance—the assurance of a little London sparrow—failed him. His attitude was tense; he peered furtively from side to side. He whimpered a little—the game was too strenuous for him; the vastness of the veld and the knowledge of his inability to conquer it overwhelmed him.

"How do you know Jake's not after you now?"

The major's question, suddenly put, helped to restore the cockney's confidence.

" 'Cause 'e went to Veldtsdorp after some supplies an' won't be back until to-morrow mornin'. I'm goin' ter give 'im a long chase, guv'nor. I'll go on again as soon as the moon comes up."

"How far do you think you're from Peterstown now?"

"Lumme, I ain't much of a 'and at guessin' distances. I rode 'ard all day yesterday an' to-day. A good 'undred miles, I should say."

The major looked at him pityingly.

"You don't know much about the veld, do you, old chap? Must have been riding round in circles. You're not more than twenty miles from Peterstown."

SMITH rose, with an oath, and stared into the inky darkness beyond the fire.

"Gawd! Then 'ere's where I make a break for it. I ain't goin' ter wait fer the moon to come hup. Tell your nigger ter bring my 'orse, Aubrey. Thanks fer the scoff, and the way yeh listened ter me."

"Don't be a fool. You'd be caught sooner or later—probably sooner. What you're going to do is this: You're going back to Peterstown and return the money. Jake won't know anything about it, and everything will be all right. And just to make sure you do it, I'm coming back with you."

"I'm damned if I go back!"

The major reached across the table and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Let me go!" A whine crept into Smith's voice. "It ain't as if I stole the money. It was mine by right; you said so. Why should I go back?"

"Because I tell you to—and here's something to back up what I say. Look!"

Smith looked at a revolver which had appeared suddenly in the major's free hand. It was leveled at his stomach. His hands dropped as if to guard the threatened spot.

"All right, guv'nor," he said meekly. "Put that bleedin' thing away. It gives me the funks. I'll do as you say. P'raps it's the best way, after all. The missus 'ud say so."

"I thought you'd see reason. Jim!"

The Hottentot rose shadowlike from his seat by the fire.

"*Baas?*"

"Inspan, Jim. We trek at once."

A GROUP of miners—hard-living, hard-drinking men, all of them—were listening to the harangue of one of their number. He, a bald-headed, rubicund little man, with an apple-cheeked, smiling face, was standing on the counter-bar of Jake Shiners' saloon, exhorting the others, with the eloquence of a soap-box orator, to break loose from the shackles which bound them.

"It's union we want," he was saying. "We ought to stand together. If we do that, we can tell this lousy Jake Shiners to go to hell." A murmur of assent came from the listeners. "Yes—you're with me now; but what will you do when Shiners comes? Will you stick by me, or will you touch your hats and bow and scrape and keep on paying him ten quid for every one quid's worth of stuff you get from him."

"That tork's all very foine and laarge," said a tall, black-bearded Cornishman. "But what be ust to do if he doan't agrees to sell to us at our price—starve? There's naught place else for us-uns to go."

"Let him sell at our price, or——"

"Or what?"

At the sound of the voice—a harsh, sneering voice—the men melted away from the little man on the counter and seated themselves at the various tables about the room.

The man behind the bar—he had been listening open-mouthed to Tubby's speech—busily began polishing the brass taps, which already shone like gold, whistling tunelessly as he did so.

Not a man in the room looked toward the open door save Tubby, who, after shouting a contemptuous "Quitters!" at his erstwhile listeners, boldly faced the man with the harsh voice.

"Or what?"

The repeated question sounded like a threat.

"I was saying, Shiners, that we've had enough of you. You'll sell us stuff at a decent price or we'll take it for nothing."

"*Allemahtig!* What is this? You would take it away from me? You yourself?"

"Me and the rest of us—yes."

"So-a—this is the way you would treat me for the way I have fed you these years past. If you don't like my way, why don't you go?"

"You know we can't leave empty-handed, Jake. We're none of us as young as we used to be. We can't make the trip without provisions, and you know none of the women could."

Shiners ignored the note of supplication in Tubby's voice.

"Does this fat sow of a man speak for you all?" he asked the others.

"No, Jake!"

"Tubby's only kiddin'!"

"We ain't grousing."

"You're all right, Jake!"

Tubby looked reproachfully at the men who had sworn to support him.

"Yes," he faltered. "I was only joking, Jake."

"*Ach sis!* Your joking will be the death of me—if it is not first the death of you."

He rolled up his sleeves, displaying hairy, mighty forearms.

"Come you here!" he said.

Tubby clambered down from the counter. Further than that his legs refused to bear him.

"So-a!" It was like the menacing hiss of a snake. "I must come to you. Give me that sjambok, Smith."

The man behind the bar turned quickly and reached for the terrible whip of rhinoceros-hide. As he did so, he saw in the mirror on the wall the reflection of a slim-waisted, broad-shouldered man.

"*Stilte!* Hurry, man!" roared Shiners. "Or must I get it myself and use it first on you?"

Smith turned quickly—empty-handed.

"'Ook it, Tubby!" he shouted. "Hout of the winder—quick!"

Tubby made a quick break, but Shiners, with a catlike pounce surprising in a man of his gigantic build, caught him and, holding him by the throat with one hand, smashed him in the face with the other. His fist was drawn back for a second blow.

"Oh, really, now! How brutal! You must stop that."

At the soft, drawling voice, Shiners loosed his hold on the luckless Tubby and turned to face the intruder.

"*Ach sis!*" he ejaculated. "Look what talks! Look!"

The miners left their seats and crowded round the newcomer.

"So-a! You think I'm brutal, do you? By Jove, now, that's too bad!"

At Shiners' clumsy burlesque of the other's drawl, the miners burst into a roar of laughter and crowded still closer.

"It ain't human," said Tubby. "If it couldn't walk and talk, I'd say as it was a dummy."

"Dear laddies," said the monocled one, "if you've quite finished, I'd like to buy you all a drink."

"He *is* human!" shouted Tubby. "Come on, stranger; let's see if you can drink as pretty as you look."

The thirsty ones lined the bar and shouted orders.

"Wait a minute, Smith!" snarled Shiners. "I want to see the color of this dude's money before you serve drinks."

"Money? Why, yes—of course. I've money. But why do you ask, old top? Is it—pardon me—any of your blinking business?"

"Seeing that I own this place, I should say that it is my business."

"Oh, splendid! Then you are Jake Shiners—yes?"

"That's my name," said Shiners heavily. "What about it?"

"Well, you see, my name's Aubrey St. John, and you're just the chappie I want to see."

Shiners grinned, winked at the miners, who were grinning as at some secret joke, wiped his greasy hands on his trousers and then clasped the other's outstretched hand.

"I'm pleased to meet you," he said, and put all his gigantic strength into the grip.

The miners watched laughingly. They expected to see the stranger wince, to break into a sweat, to moan, to plead for mercy as many apparently stronger men had done. But the stranger only stiffened, placed his feet a little farther apart and continued to smile blandly.

Shiners' face grew crimson; his shoulders hunched up with the effort he was making.

"Let's drink," he said suddenly, with a gasp of astonishment. "We don't have to stand here shaking hands all day."

"All right," said the dude, and, releasing his hold, joined the others at the bar.

SHINERS, scowling fiercely, retired to a table in a far corner of the room, and there the dude, after a little while, joined him.

"I say, old top," he began; "they tell me you know all there is to know about this bally burg. Is there any gold about here?"

"Now you're talking! You've heard about the boom we had three years ago?" The other nodded. "Well, we're going to have another boom bigger than that. She's liable to break any day. Ain't she, boys?"

"You've said it, Jake!" shouted two or three of the men at the bar. But there was no trace of enthusiasm in their voices.

"Else why would we stay here?" questioned another.

"Because we can't get away," Tubby responded, with spirit.

Jake scowled at this, but the stranger affected not to hear.

"Really?" he said. "That's top-hole, because I thought of taking up a claim. I suppose you own several, old top."

Shiners sighed.

"Wish I did. But the boys have got 'em all pegged out, and you can't get 'em to sell at no price."

"That's too bad," cooed the dude. "I was hoping to stake a claim. It must be ripping, you know, to get gold from dirt. Such an easy way of getting rich, don't you know."

This was too much for Jake, and he laughed uproariously.

"This whisky is beastly stuff," continued the monocled one. "Haven't you some fizz—champagne, you know?"

"I'll get you a bottle."

Jake, grinning widely, went behind the bar.

Smith dodged as he neared, and Jake smiled. He had not forgotten Smith's early defiance, but just now he chose to ignore it.

"I'm going to clean out the *verdoemte* dude," he whispered. "If you'll help me, I'll forget that other matter."

"All right, guv'nor," Smith whispered back. "But 'e ain't no dude. 'E's the major. You've 'eard of 'im; 'aven't you?"

Jake looked over at the gracefully slouching figure.

"The major? You sure?"

"Yes, guv'nor. I saw a picture of 'im once in a police notice. 'E's a crafty devil, they say, for all he loooks so soft."

"*Allemahtig!*" Shiners rubbed his fingers. They were still numb from the major's crushing grip. "He's not soft. Yes; I've heard of the major. And—you're right, Smith; that's him. He's slim" crafty)—"yes; because the police are fools. Now he meets a man who is slim, too, and we shall see. He tried to fool me; he makes believe that he is a monocled fool. All right. If you help me Smith, I'll give you a quid."

"It's a go, guv'nor. What do you want me to do?"

"Fix his drink to put him to sleep—I'm going to take him into my office—and get these men out of here."

Two hours later Smith quietly entered the cluttered room which served as Jake's office.

Seated on a chair, his arms sprawled over the grease-bespattered table, his head on his arms, was the major. His hair was all tousled. He was only partly dressed. Most of his clothing was strewn about the room.

"It's only me, guv'nor," Smith said. "Are yeh all right?"

The major straightened up quickly and laughed softly.

"Jake made a bally good job of it; didn't he? He ought to be in the police. He could teach them a lot about the searching game."

He rose to his feet and sluiced his face with water from the bucket which stood on a rickety stand in the corner of the room. As he dried himself, he whistled softly.

"He hasn't left me a penny!" he exclaimed later, as, having dressed, he felt in his pockets. "He has even taken my cigarettes. The hog!"

"Yus. He's all that," Smith assented. "'Ere—let me 'elp you wiv them ridin'-boots. S'welp me!"

"What now?"

"'E's pried hoff the 'eels, guv'nor."

The major chuckled.

"Yes; I watched him do that. It was very funny. He had the deuce and all of a job."

"'Ow do yeh feel, guv'nor?"

"Top-hole. But what was that beastly drink you fixed for me?"

Smith grinned.

"Sour tea and powdered quinine, guv'nor. And yeh can thank yer bleedin' stars it wasn't the stuff Jake's made me fix up fer other coveys. 'E thought it was—but I 'ad the powdered quinine all ready for you."

The major made a wry face.

"It was terrible, Smith, but it did the job. Put me to sleep in ten minutes. It was bally hard not to laugh, though, while Jake was searching me. The beggar tickled. Did you do the other things?"

"Yus. Some of the boys are hout in the barroom now, guv'nor. I told 'em just wot yeh told me to—no more, no less."

JAKE SHINERS' eyes roamed wrathfully around the major's tent. It looked as if a cyclone had struck it, and the fact that he had been the cyclone did not lessen his ill humor.

On learning that the dude who called himself "Aubrey St. John" was really the famous—or infamous—I. D. B., Jake had reasoned that the major must have some diamonds with him, and, when the search of the major's person had been fruitless, he had determined to search the major's camp.

And now it seemed that the search of the tent was also to prove fruitless.

He turned, with a furious oath, to where Jim, bound hand and foot, was lying in the corner of the tent.

"Tell me where your *baas* keeps his diamonds," he roared, "or—" He menaced Jim with a sjambok.

"I do not know, *baas*."

The whip rose and fell. Jim's eyes narrowed.

"Wait, *baas!* Let me think. I will tell you. But, first, you must promise to save me from my *baas's* wrath."

Shiners licked his lips greedily.

"I will take care your *baas* does not whip you," he said.

"He is a hard man, *baas,*" said Jim. "I will tell you where the stones are. Look in the water-barrel, *baas*. You will find them there."

Shiners rushed out of the tent, and Jim, turning on his side, his ear pressed close to the ground, smiled happily. He heard a distant pounding on the hard, sun-baked veld—a pounding that came ever nearer; the *"tot-a-a-tot-a, three ha' pence for tuppence"* of a horse approaching at the triple—that pace-deceiving gait of the major's mount.

But Jake Shiners did not hear it—no white man would have heard it. The major was, he well believed, still in the room back of the bar, sleeping the heavy sleep of the drugged.

AND so Jake gave all his attention to the barrel. It was a big one, and filled to the brim with water. It was too heavy for him to tip over, and it was too deep for him to reach inside to the bottom, where, he was well convinced, the diamonds were hidden.

There was only one thing to do: to knock out the bung—a makeshift affair of pitch—and let the water drain out.

He pulled out the plug and then sat down, his back to the tree-trunk, and smoked his pipe with great enjoyment. He had plenty of time. The major was safe for several hours yet. He thought pleasantly of the diamonds—wealth—which would soon be his. He indulged in day-dreams of the luxuries he could command. In order that he might visualize them more clearly, he closed his eyes. Perhaps he dozed; the day was very hot, and it was so peaceful out there under the trees——

He opened his eyes and swore. The water had ceased flowing from the bung-hole. He jumped to his feet and saw that the barrel was empty save for some six inches of water below the bung-hole. He tilted the barrel.

Carefully, yet with difficulty restraining his feverish impatience, he up-ended the barrel. The "things" rattled down the side of it and on to the ground.

One, two, three, seven, ten, twelve. How Jake's eyes gleamed! Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, twenty. Twenty in all! He pounced on them and picked them up. One by one he examined them closely—closer—and then, cursing, he threw them away. They were stones—not diamonds.

He rushed back to the tent. That *verdoemte* Hottentot would pay for this.

Then he stopped short, turned in his tracks, mounted his horse and spurred swiftly away. In his ears sounded the mocking laughter of the major and Jim, the Hottentot.

"It is well that you came when you did, *baas,*" said Jim. "I do not like to be beaten."

"But he did beat you, Jim." The major indicated the weal on the Hottentot's naked shoulder.

Jim chuckled.

"Only once, *baas*. I was well paid for it. Under the flap of the tent I looked, and I saw him find the stones which were not stones."

The major's eyes glittered steely blue; the vacuous expression of his face disappeared; the lines of his jaw seemed to tighten. And then he relaxed.

"All right, Jim," he said. "Get the bung—I'll make another—that one's too loose—and then we'll go for water."

Jim left the tent, returning almost immediately with the bung.

The major took it with a smile, and carefully breaking it with the butt of his revolver, he picked over the pieces until he had on the table before him twenty rounded stones. Diamonds—not stones!

"We must find another place for them, Jim."

The major was speaking English now, as he often did when alone with Jim. Not that Jim understood—save a word here and there—but it always helped him to work out his problems.

"It'll never do," he continued. " 'Pon my soul it won't—to hide the bally things twice in the same place. I think they'd be safe here for the present; don't you, Jim?"

"Yah, *baas;*" agreed Jim, seeing that some comment was expected, and the major carelessly dropped the stones into a cigar-box.

"The trouble with this bally business is the difficulty I have in finding a good market. In the course of the years, Jim, old scout, we've handled hundreds of stones between us, and they were worth thousands and thousands and thousands of pounds. And yet I'm not rich. Wonder why."

"Not rich—golly, no!"

"I suppose it's because the dealers know my trade and I have to take what they want to pay. If they don't buy I can't sell anywhere. Of course I could carry them round with me and take a chance of smuggling them out of the country. But that's a risky game, and, if I'm caught, twenty years on the breakwater. I'm afraid I'm not made for hard labor, Jim."

"Yah, *baas*."

"Don't be a blooming pessimist, Jim." The major sighed. "But really I'd like to go to Jo'burg for a spree. Haven't seen the dear old town for months and months. And I can't go there without lots of money. You know, Jim, if I could sell only two or three of these diamonds at half their value, I'd be rolling, simply rolling, in wealth."

"Yah, *baas*."

"I think I shall sell some of the stones to dear old Jake. He seemed very anxious to get them. I think—no; I'm absolutely bally well sure —that he would pay a very good price for them—a very good price, indeed. My price, in fact. Don't you think so, Jim?"

"Yah, *baas*. Top-'ole, yah, by Jove! Jus' what you say."

"You're a treasure, Jim!" the major cried. "He shall pay me—oh, he'll be most willing and anxious to pay—just what I say. I wonder how much he's worth."

"CHERRI-O, old top! Balmy weather we're having, and all that. Eh—what?"

Jake Shiners looked up with a scowl. His hand reached in the open drawer of his desk and closed on a revolver.

Since his little searching party five days previously, he had steered clear of the major. Yet he had expected that man to come gunning for him, and wondered why he had delayed so long. And now Jake's nerves were rather ragged.

No fool with a gun himself, he knew that if but half the things he had heard were true, the major could beat him to the draw. He wondered if he could slide the gun from the drawer unobserved. The major would be watching the one in his holster.

"Not very chummy this bright day, are you?" the bland voice continued. "Tut, tut, and again tut. I haven't come a-shooting, dear old chap. So shut that drawer—and leave the revolver inside."

The last words came with a snap, and, as if to enforce them, a revolver suddenly appeared in the major's hand.

Jake shut the drawer with a bang.

"Well?" he snarled.

"Ah! That's much better. We'll be like two cooing doves before long—a regular Damon and Pythias and all that, you know. But perhaps you don't know."

"No, I don't. What do you want with me?"

The major twirled the revolver in his hand, returned it to the holster, pulled up a chair beside Jake's and sat down.

"Just a little talk, old dear—a business talk."

"*Stilte!* You talk business with me?"

"Exactly. 'Pon my word, your lack of discernment is quite embarrassing. Of course you know who I am—clever of you not to show it when we first met—and I know why you searched me and my camp."

Jake mumbled something about having made a mistake.

"Oh, don't apologize. I don't blame you. I should have done exactly the same thing myself had I been you. But you shouldn't have whipped Jim. Really, you shouldn't."

Jake shifted uneasily. But the major's soft tones carried no threat, and he replied:

"He's only a nigger, Major. A nigger don't mind sjamboking once in a while.

The major's eyes narrowed.

"I see," he said rather absently; "I see your point of view exactly. Yes, indeed! However, to return to business: I'm quite ready to forget the little affair you pulled off—quite willing if you are. I don't think you'll do anything like that again. No? Of course not! No reason to. You know now that I haven't any diamonds; don't you?"

"For God's sake, get to business, Major," Jake exclaimed irritably. "You talk like an old *Vrouw*."

"But first tell me this, old dear: Shall we let bygones be bygones, or is it the frozen mitt and the back of my hand to you?"

"I'm willing to forget all about it."

"Good! Now you must swear not to tell any one what I am going to tell you now."

"I swear." Jake's tone was that of an indulgent parent humoring a talkative child. "What is on your mind?"

"S-sh!"

The major put his fingers to his lips, tiptoed to the door, opened it suddenly and peered about, closed it and came back to his chair.

"I thought there might be some one listening," he explained.

"There is," Jake said sarcastically. "I am. That's all I've been doing since you came here."

The major held up a protesting hand.

"You do me an injustice. It is essential that I be very cautious, as you shall see."

"Get to business, man!"

"Well" —the major drew his chair still closer to Jake's—"that boom you've been talking about so long is here."

"What are you talking about?"

Jake was torn between two emotions. He wanted to believe the major, and yet——

"Do you mean they've located a rich strike?"

The major nodded mysteriously.

"Something like that. It's true. Look!"

HE PLACED a small package on Jake's desk, unwrapped it and exposed a lump of clayish substance.

"Do you know what that is?"

"Blue clay, fool! What about it?"

"And what do they find in blue clay? Tell me that."

The major's whisper was dramatic in its intensity. Jake's jaw sagged. He looked in bewilderment at the lump of clay.

"What—" he began, and stopped. The look of bewilderment gave way to one of comprehension. "Why," he exclaimed suddenly, "diamonds are found in blue clay! Where did you find this?"

"Softly," cautioned the major. "Now look at these."

"These" were ten stones—unmistakably diamonds, unlovely in their uncut, unpolished state.

"*Maan*," cried Jake, "do you mean to say you found these in Peterstown? It means our fortunes! But why"—and suspicion took the place of joy—"do you come to me?"

"Because I can't swing a big thing like this alone, in the first place; in the second" —the major smiled whimsically and sighed —"I'm far too well and widely known to get a diamond-mining permit. They wouldn't give me one."

"That's right; they wouldn't," Jake assented. He was beginning to see light.

"But," continued the major hurriedly, "you can get one without any trouble, and no questions asked. You do that—and we'll go half-shares. Do you agree?"

"No. I do all the work—take all the risk. I should get seventy-five per cent. of the shares and you twenty-five."

The major shrugged his shoulders.

"You're a hog, Jake, but I'll accept. The Lord knows twenty-five per cent. will bring me all the money I want. I'll be a multimillionaire. Think of it, old top."

His enthusiasm was infectious. Jake smiled. At that moment he was scheming to retain all the proceeds. He would be the sole owner; he would be the richest man in this world. Barney Barnato and the Joels would be paupers compared with him.

"Let's shake on it, Major," he said. He held out a greasy paw.

The major was at that moment polishing his monocle.

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind, old chap. You have such a bone-crushing grip, you know."

Jake leered.

"It is as a girl's compared to yours, Major. But what's the next move?"

"I'm a pretty poor business man," confessed the major; "but how does this strike you? You go for the diamond-mining permit, and I'll buy up the claims—you want to get 'em all; don't you?"

"Yes. We want them all. But you must think I'm soft to leave you up here running things. How do I know but what you'll do me out of the whole business?"

The major looked hurt.

"You wrong me—really, you do. What good would the claims be to me without a permit?"

"That's right, too."

"And here's another point: I can buy the claims cheaper than you. They'd suspect something if you started buying. Now, me—they think I'm a fool. They'd never suspect me of anything. They'd sell me—don't you see?"

"With what will you buy the claims? Your money?"

The major chuckled and rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Ah! Now you're joking," he said waggishly. "I had but ten quid, and you cleaned me out of that the other day. No. You're going to provide the wherewithal, Jake, dear soul."

"I'm damned if I do!"

"All right." The major picked up the diamonds—one by one—and put them in his pocket. "I'll tell the chappie on whose claim I found these. They're legally his, you know."

He rose from his chair and walked toward the door.

"Ta-ta, old chap!" he called over his shoulder.

"Wait, *Maan!* Don't be so hasty." Jake was panic-stricken.

The major returned to his chair.

"You're hard on me, Major," Jake whined. "How do I know you'll play square?"

"You don't. That's the funny part of it. But—don't you see?—we can't run this any other way. I'd go if I could, but they'd laugh at me. You know that. No. I'm afraid you'll have to trust me. But wait—I have it! You want some security for my good behavior; don't you? Quite natural that you should. How much would you say these stones were worth?"

"Five hundred pounds," Jake replied promptly.

The major almost fell from his chair with laughter.

"Say six thousand, and you'd still be getting a bargain, Jake. I'm not talking about an I. D. B. price; they'll be legally mined. The smallest one there is worth more than your price."

"I'll say five thousand," conceded Jake. "But what of it?"

"Wait a minute! At how much do you value your property, including cash on hand?"

Jake turned to his desk and did some unnecessary figuring—at any moment Jake could have told to a penny just how much he was worth.

"There's four thousand pounds in cash."

"By Jove! So much?" the major exclaimed in tones of admiration.

"Don't believe in banks," Jake explained. "Keep all my cash where I can put my hands on it."

The major nodded understandingly.

"Four thousand pounds in cash," he said. "Yes—go on!"

"I don't know what you're driving at; but I value the property—mules, horses, wagons, everything, including the bad debts—at one thousand pounds."

"High valuation, Jake, old dear! But that's the way to get rich. Five thousand in all—eh?" Jake nodded. "Very well, then. Don't you see that you can't lose? You take the diamonds with you when you go for the permit. At your own valuation they are worth at least as much as your property and cash together. As a matter of fact, you know they're worth a bally sight more." Jake's eyes gleamed as he nodded assent. "All you have to do, then, is to give me power—er—power of attorney, I think they call it, to buy the claims for you. That makes it sure that whatever I buy will be yours—that I am only acting as your agent. See?"

Jake hesitated a moment.

"All right," he said finally. "Give me the diamonds."

"The power of attorney first."

Jake picked up a pen and began to write.

"That's fine!" said the major a few minutes later. "How's your man, Smith? Can he keep his mouth closed?"

"He'd better," growled Jake.

"Fine! We'll have him in to witness this. Here are the stones."

Jake took them greedily.

"When will you start, Jake?"

"To-morrow. I'd go to-night if there was a moon. You'll be careful; won't you? Don't want any of the —— to tumble to our game."

"They'll not," said the major airily. "They're such bally idiots they would not believe there were diamonds on their claims if I told them. You'll be back inside of ten days; won't you?"

"Yah."

"Fine! I'll have all the claims for you by then. When you signed this paper, Jake, you made our fortunes."

Jake grinned. He was thinking that he had, indeed, made his fortune; but he replied:

"Call in Smith if you want to, Major, and get him to witness that paper. I'm going to bed then. Got to make an early start to-morrow morning."

NEARLY a month elapsed before Jake Shiners again rode over the veld toward Peterstown.

Instead of returning as soon as he had

procured his mining permit, he decided to stay a while and enjoy the pleasures that wicked city had to offer. Jake was no cheap sport where his own selfish pleasures were concerned; besides, he knew the capital well—it was his native town—and his tastes ran high. Also, Jake was a poor card player and the town was—probably still is—full of card-sharps, confidence men and the like.

In one day Jake lost all the money he had with him, but he had not lost his taste for the night life and, in order to pander to that taste, he offered the ten diamonds for sale. The only dealer who would talk business with him was one who was not above buying from an I. D. B.—and Jake was suspected of being that. In fact, he rather posed as such among the habitués of the gambling-houses, thinking thus to ward off any possible chance of some one following him back to Peterstown. The dealer's highest offer for the stones was eight hundred pounds—"Take it or leave it."

Jake took it, and left it with certain expert card players.

Broke at last, Jake set his steps Peterstownward—broke, but happy. The diamonds were gone; but he cheered himself with the thought that there were plenty more where they came from.

Most of the time during the tedious journey home—the train trip to Veldtsdorp, and the two days' trek on horseback from that place to Peterstown—Jake spent in thinking up suitable schemes to oust the major from the partnership.

But as he rode into Peterstown he had many other things to think of. The place was deserted! Not a soul was to be seen—the houses were empty—uninhabited.

Jake began to sweat, and it was not wholly due to the heat. Spurring his horse to a mad gallop, he came to his saloon. It, too, was empty; the table and chairs, the long counter and the bottles on the shelf, were covered with dust. The brass taps were tarnished; mice scampered about the floor.

A letter was sticking in the gilt frame of the mirror behind the bar counter. It was addressed to him.

Wonderingly, fearing he knew not what—but fearing—Jake took it down, opened it and read:

DEAR JAKE:

The night after you left I held a meeting of the miners and was astonished to find that they were more than willing to sell their claims, and, I flatter myself, I bought them dirt cheap for you.

The miners are jolly old chappies; aren't they? And very accomodating. All they asked was fifty pounds each, a release from their debts to you, provisions and conveyance to Veldtsdorp. Bally reasonable—what? I agreed to their terms, of course, and the next day we sent off the first batch in your wagon. It was a merry sight to see the old codgers and their wives going to a decent, civilized town. They all gave three cheers for you—that should brighten your generous heart. Of course I did not tell them why you wanted the claims.

Well, well! To cut a long story short, the next ten days we were busy—oh, very busy!—sending parties off.

Quite some job, old chap!

When the last batch lined up, ready to depart, Jake, I decided to go, too. It would have been terribly boring here all alone, and worse still when you returned. And then I remembered that Jim—the Hottentot, you know—owned two claims, and as you said you wanted all the claims, of course I had to buy Jim's. And the beggar held me up! There was just fifteen hundred pounds of your ready money left, and the heathen made me pay it all. He wanted a lot of tobacco, too, and a mouth-organ and some scent. I refused him the scent, so he took a felt hat instead. The hat cost more than the scent, but, as you now have *all* the claims, I'm sure you're satisfied.

I am.

Cheeri-o, old top!

Your ex-partner,
THE MAJOR.

P. S. I forgot to say that Mr. Bill Bruiser Smith helped me a great deal, so I paid him fifty pounds for his services. He said that you owed him a year's pay, and also a quid for mixing a certain drink. He seems to be a truthful chappie; so I paid his claim. I think the blue clay I showed you came from Veldtsdorp; I know the diamonds did.

P. P. S. Jim says that you did not hurt him very much when you hit him with a sjambok. The weal has quite disappeared, and Jim says he likes the tobacco very much and is sorry he couldn't have the scent. I'm not. My people are calling. I go now, like a modern Moses, to lead the Peterstownites out of the House of Bondage—out of the House of Shiners, in a manner of speaking.

Keep a stiff upper lip, dear lad, and don't swear too much.

BUT Jake Shiners—sole owner and inhabitant of Peterstown—did swear. He cursed loudly and continuously—cursed until he was exhausted and could curse no more.

But his curses fell on empty walls; there was no one to hear them, and, having no place else to roost, they fell on his own head.

The Kiss

A Self-righteous Prig, Whose Ego Is Proof against a Battering-ram, Is Jolted into Decency by One Terrible Moment of Self-Revelation. An Exceptional Story

By I. A. R. Wylie

Illustration by Harry Fisk

THE motto of the old *Miranda* was: "Go anywhere; do anything." Captain Guffry had given it, and he knew why, seeing that he and she had belonged to each other from the moment she left her slips on the Clyde and had weathered the war most gallantly in each other's company. Now that more prosaic days had come, the *Miranda* was still prepared to take on any job that offered itself. She would start from Tilbury laden with tin kettles and come back with her holds stowed tight with oranges or safety-razors or all the treasures of the Orient. Passengers she carried, too. Captain Guffry regarded passengers, in fact, as casual freight which could be dumped anywhere where the tin kettles or the oranges had not penetrated. He rather liked them. They paid well and, owing to the *Miranda's* mannerisms in a fairish sea, they usually ate little. Moreover, the kind of passengers that favored her—commercial travelers, gentlemen anxious to leave the country unobtrusively or odd fry, like myself—required no frills with their entertainment. And frills Captain Guffry, who had risen from the rank of cabin-boy, abhorred. He liked to be "at home on his own ship," as he put it, and at home presumably he went about in his shirt-sleeves and roared out his old sea-dog's yarns, more or less suitable for domestic consumption, at the top of his enormous voice. But he was a good seaman and a good fellow generally, and when he had made sure that my overdelicate appearance—I had had a bad breakdown, which had driven me to share in the *Miranda's* happy-go-lucky wanderings—did not reveal a spinsterish and killjoy spirit, we became friends.

I suppose the queerest freight the *Miranda* had ever carried was the Reverend Evered Boldwyn. He came on board at Dudich-on-Sea, the *Miranda's* home port, and though, of course, Captain Guffry must have heard of his advent from the company, he certainly did not "realize" him until the next night, when they met at dinner for the first time. That the meeting was a painful one, to Captain Guffry, at least, was obvious to the most indifferent observer. There was nothing subtle or restrained about the captain. He looked like a very large man who had been caught by a very small man doing something supremely silly, and his swearing ostentatiously a moment afterward at the head steward only heightened the impression.

Mr. Boldwyn gave no sign at all. He made a correct little bow all round, and then said grace—in Latin. Nobody had asked him to, and nobody had expected it of him. Somehow, it was altogether out of keeping with the *Miranda's* tradition.

We were talking rather noisily at the time, to cover over the captain's patent discomfiture, but at the first sound of "*Infunde, quæsumus, Domine Deus,*" we might all of us have been shot dead. Even the head steward, a self-opinionated creature who liked to do things in his own time, stood paralysed, with the soup from half a dozen plates splashing over him. I almost expected the *Miranda* to stop rolling. As a matter of fact, she was giving an exhibition of her very worst paces, and from his appearance and from what I learned of him afterward, I know that Mr. Boldwyn was feeling deadly, hideously ill. But he held out, right to the bitter end of that meal, which must have been very bitter indeed—and returned thanks with his little lopsided-looking face absolutely livid. There was a queer streak of determination in his character which, if it hadn't clashed so violently with one's general dislike of him, one would have called "gameness."

IN THE smoking-room afterward, Captain Guffry exploded. It was a noisy but not particularly illuminating explosion. I think most of us gathered that, angry as he was, Captain Guffry managed to suppress some very important factor in the situation. And I certainly had noticed Mr. Boldwyn's smile when they met at dinner—not so much a smile as a faint tightening of the small mouth that suggested a subacid benevolency not at all lovable. One felt that he had cracked a rather mean little clerical joke at Captain Guffry's expense.

"A spy," Captain Guffry rumbled; "a dirty, mealy-faced, flint-hearted spy! I know him. Friend of a director of the company. Sky-pilot to poor old Dudich. Calls himself a Christian! Why, an honest seaman can't even be sure of his grog now that that pipsqueak's got going. Well—I'll show him; I'll teach him who's boss here. I'll make him wish he'd stuck to his mothers' meetings before he started giving thanks on board my ship without so much as a 'with your leave.' And in some blasted foreign lingo, too——"

The purser interposed nervously.

"He's been asking if he can have the saloon for Sunday service at eleven, sir. I said I supposed so, though I'd have to ask you first. It's the usual thing, ain't it?"

Captain Guffry gaped. He must have seen even then that, as a friend of a director, Mr. Boldwyn had the whip-hand. Then suddenly his expression changed. It became positively malevolent.

He rammed his tobacco home with a wicked thumb.

"We'll be in the thick of it going through the bay," he said. "Anything that little whelk wants on Sunday he can have."

It was an excellent joke. We roared in unison, and among ourselves Mr. Boldwyn remained the "whelk"—well, until Santa Monica, at any rate. As a description, it was so absolutely right.

Ever since I had been a boy I had dreamed of just such a voyage—on just such a rolling old tub of a freighter, with just such a foul-mouthed, golden-hearted old captain. And now it had come true, and I was still young enough to feel the wonder of it. Even my fellow travelers fitted into the picture. There were half a dozen in all. Not one of them would I have cared to introduce to my family, and each could tell a tale of life in distant parts of the world such as could never have been told in the sober township whence I hailed. We had all come together in Scotland, and Dudich was our first "call." It was a mean, half-forgotten port, and I have my shrewd suspicions that Captain Guffry had manufactured business there in order to get another glimpse of his wife and home before setting out on his month's wanderings.

Anyhow, we were to leave at midnight. And at eleven o'clock I was leaning over the taffrail, watching the final preparations, and thrilled with that sense of mystery and great adventure which a ship about to cast anchor gives us when all other thrills have failed. I found myself whispering, "Gibraltar—Majorca—Genoa—Naples," as though they had been words of enchantment.

Then I saw Mr. Boldwyn.

It speaks well either for my intuitiveness or Mr. Boldwyn's power of impressing the full significance of his personality on you at first sight that my heart sank. He was standing on the quay, focused by the full glare of the *Miranda's* search-light, and to describe him I can only think—not of a whelk but of a frightened rabbit very much on its dignity. He looked at the ship as at an evil, threatening thing, and his wife and the two little girls who stood beside him amidst the pile of luggage looked at it, too, in just the same horrified sort of way, only that their horror was mixed with awe, as if they knew that the narrow-shouldered, insignificant man in the clergyman's coat was capable of subduing an enemy twice as big and twice as wicked.

And, oddly enough, there was a sort of

power about him—you felt it at once—a kind of prim power, absurdly, comically sinister. The two little girls were exactly what you would have expected under the circumstances—white baby rabbits. You felt that if you clapped your hands they would jump around, showing their scared little scuds, and bolt. But his wife was like him, too. Which sounds impossible, because she was so pretty—and so timid and gentle-looking. I couldn't think at the time how he had managed to set his mark on her in that way. But you could read, 'She for God in him' written all over her.

They hardly spoke. Presently a steward—or what passed for a steward on board the *Miranda*—sauntered out of the shadow. Mr. Boldwyn lifted a finger at him. I knew the fellow. He was about the roughest diamond ever dug out of the soil. I myself would sooner have carried my traps unaided than lifted fingers at him. And, in fact, there was trouble enough indicated in his slouching descent on Mr. Boldwyn.

"Nah, then—who d'ye think *you* are?"

Then, suddenly, he wilted. He seemed actually to cringe. He passed behind me a few moments later, carrying two suitcases and a hold-all, and this time his remark was not a matter of conjecture.

"Thinks 'e owns the bloomin' ship!"

He said it to reinstate himself, but he could not make me forget that I had seen him touch his cap.

Then the "All aboard!" sounded, and Mr. Boldwyn kissed his family. I don't know whether or not he kissed them on the forehead, but it looked like it. From the top of the gangway he waved to them—or, rather, he lifted his hand very much as he had done to Sims, the steward; only, this time it was in benediction. He repeated the gesture as slowly the *Miranda* turned her blunt nose to the night and the sea, and the little group waved meekly back to him. I could see Mrs. Boldwyn, now only a fragile shadow in the murky lights of the quay, urging on the white baby rabbits to greater endeavor and perhaps telling them not to cry because daddy would be home soon. But I don't think they were crying. I don't think they felt like that. Only, Mrs. Boldwyn——

And yet, somehow, the trio made an oddly forlorn, pathetic little group. It was so late. The white baby rabbits ought to have been in bed long since. And there was their God and their All steaming from them further and further into the terrible Unknown.

WELL, all the passengers who could stand and as many of the crew as could be spared came to that Sunday service. The first mate, whose talent for vamping the latest music-hall ditties had betrayed him, played "For Those in Peril on the Sea" and we sang from the hymn-books which Mr. Boldwyn provided out of one of the suitcases. Captain Guffry stayed on his bridge, dogged and sullen-browed. His ally, the Bay of Biscay, had failed him. Mr. Boldwyn went out twice during the hymns and came back, looking, if possible, a shade greener, but still composed and perfectly master of himself and of us. I think he felt that he was a sort of lion-tamer in a den of lions, and that if he turned his back on us we would run amuck.

We never did. I had not realized before how a single man who is absolutely in the right and has nothing on his conscience can impose his will ruthlessly on a whole community. In three days, every one except the *Miranda* herself was behaving according to Mr. Boldwyn's standards. The sea-yarns with which Captain Guffry had adorned our meals died at birth. I could see him calling up all his resentful courage to begin, but he never got beyond the first sentences. Under Mr. Boldwyn's pale, attentive eyes he realized, I think for the first time, poor old fellow, either that his story was not true or that it was not nice. Our conversation degenerated at last to the weather and even politics.

We hated him. We would have gladly thrown him overboard, but short of that we were at his mercy. I think he knew it and was pleased in a prim, well-regulated sort of way. It was as if he had been challenged and had got the better of some one. But I was to understand.

From the start, Mr. Boldwyn must have recognized from my profession as a doctor and the creases down my trousers that we were kindred spirits in the midst of a savage tribe. At any rate, the morning after we had weathered the bay he came upon me sheltered under the lee of mysterious freight and, arranging a coil of rope, sat down beside me.

"I am not disturbing you?" he asked.

I had my pipe and my book, and, anyway, he was about the last person on the high seas I wanted to talk to, but his manner was so absolutely correct, at once courteous and confident, that I could do no less than lie amiably.

"We two," he said, with his little pale smile, "ought to know each other. Our professional interests are closely related, don't you think? And, moreover, for men of our upbringing and outlook, this ship—not to put too fine a point on it—is like a desert island."

I felt oddly helpless, as if I were bound to agree with him, and consequently rather nettled.

"I don't know," I answered. "For my part, I am enjoying the change. It does men of our type good to be tried against harder metal."

"You think our companions are of harder metal?" he asked.

"I shouldn't care to back myself against the captain; would you?" I retorted.

I can't say that he looked contemptuous. It was something much too aloof.

"You are speaking of things physical," he said. "I should call most of our companions weak men."

"They have their faults," I admitted, "but I think that underneath it all they are good fellows—with their own peculiar virtues, which, perhaps, we lack."

He answered without any symptom of impatience. I might have been a child to whom he was explaining something elementary.

"What you call 'faults' I should call 'vices.' Vicious men are fundamentally weak. However strong and courageous they may be—and I take it that courage and strength are two of the virtues you have in mind—they are at the mercy of their vices and, for that matter, at the mercy of pure virtue."

I wish I could describe him as he sat looking primly down at his neat little hands. But his were the sort of features that are forgotten as soon as they are out of sight. In any case, they were completely subjugated by the overweening forehead, the more remarkable because of the scanty, colorless hair which receded from it like a tide on the ebb. His pallor was intense—a kind of glistening gray—out of which his blue eyes stared with a vaguely wistful protuberance. His eyes were, in fact, rather disconcerting to your dislike of him. They reminded you that in his time he, too, had been a white baby rabbit.

BUT, at any rate, I had seen light. I knew now why even the cook, who was notorious, had returned to the *Miranda* sober at Marseilles. Pure virtue! Why, he had the whip-hand of us all. We were like helpless, overawed children. I wanted to laugh. But, somehow, I felt too soured.

"You must find that fact pretty useful in your work," I said, with unsuccessful sarcasm.

He assented gravely.

"Dudich is a difficult parish—was, I should say. My predecessor had been a man rather of your outlook—if you will forgive my saying so—slack and sentimental, and prepared to see extenuating circumstances everywhere. As a part consequence, Dudich was one of the most dissolute seaports on the west coast. For it is amazing and terrifying to see how one responsible man in a small town can set the tone. In the old days it was not possible to go out at night, even in the respectable residential quarters, without meeting some drunken seaman reeling his way back to his ship. Well, all that is changed now. Even on the water-front, which was considered an impregnable fortress, we have set our flag. We have a mission-hall there, where we have weekly meetings—" He paused and then added, "It was there, in fact, that I met Captain Guffry for the first time."

I said "Indeed?" hiding my real curiosity, and he asked,

"I wonder if the story of our acquaintance would interest you?" as if he wanted to make quite clear how it was he had got into such bad company.

"Yes; he came to see me in my office there one evening after a meeting. It was in reference to one of my parishioners—a girl whose name I need not mention. It appeared that she was the daughter of one of his old shipmates, who had been drowned at sea. She had gone wrong—run away with a married man—and the adventure had turned out badly. She had come home, but her family would have nothing to do with her. Captain Guffry wanted me to reinstate her—go bail for her, as he put it. He actually wanted me to get her a post with one of my wealthy parishioners as a sewing maid, and when I naturally refused, suggested that she should be made caretaker of the church—a position then vacant. I said to him frankly that I could not recommend such a girl into any decent household, and that if she was not fit to enter a decent human home she was not fit to have care of the House of God—that was obvious."

Mr. Boldwyn waited, and I said, "Quite," as though I had been hypnotised. He nodded, well satisfied with me.

"With a man like Guffry, one has to hit straight from the shoulder. He did not like it. He promised that he would break up my meetings in the future, and he kept his word. The next night the hall was invaded by a gang of roughs, and the police had to come to the protection of my female helpers. I myself remained in the hall till they had tired themselves out. When, as I thought, the last of them had gone, I prepared to return home——"

He stopped again, and I looked at him curiously. As I said before, there was that queer streak of "gameness" in him. I was sure that he had faced the howling mob unruffled and unafraid—Mr. Evered Boldwyn and his "unconquerable soul" together.

"And then?" I suggested.

"Captain Guffry joined me. I was just crossing one of the most deserted quays and there was no one within hailing-distance. I remember, too, how dark it was. Captain Guffry caught me by the arm. For the moment I thought he meant to throw me into the water, for he is, as you know, a man of violent and undisciplined passions; but, instead, he dragged me with him up and down the quay-side, shouting at the top of his voice—blaspheming——"

A CURIOUS change had come into Mr. Boldwyn's face. Was it the keen seawind that had lashed up that faint color in his pallid cheeks, or was it anger—resentment—an old humiliation? His eyes had lost their vagueness and fixed themselves on me with a cold intensity.

"He was drunk, disgustingly drunk. I suppose to you that would seem a mitigating circumstance, Dr. Masters. To me it rendered the whole scene indescribably detestable. I wish I could forget the things he said. They were half grotesque, half horrible. One might have imagined that the Almighty and he were old shipmates—boon companions. He raved about the sea as though his acquaintance with the element gave him a kind of right to—to admonish me on my ignorance of men and life, to plead with me as though I were a soul trembling on the verge to perdition—yes; actually, Dr. Masters, absurd though it sounds, that is what he said. He was so violent—so elemental that I seemed to feel myself in the grip of a typhoon. In the end he wept—nauseatingly. I did not know what to hope—whether that a policeman would relieve me or that no one should find me in such a humiliating predicament."

I lit my pipe to save a reply. I saw it all now—the poor old captain drinking himself to the point where he could burst through his own rough crust and pour out his muddled philosophy, his shamefaced tendernesses and reserves, his pity and his dear-bought wisdom over this little squiff who had seen in him only a nauseating spectacle of human degradation. I knew now why the captain looked like a beaten schoolboy.

I saw Mr. Boldwyn, too—helpless, resentful, for the first time in his life spiritually browbeaten. It was an offense he would never forgive or forget, unless——

"And so," I said at last, "you chose the *Miranda* for a cruise."

"That is so. It happened that one of my congregation is a director of the line. He had noticed that my wife—that I, rather—had seemed in need of a change, and he offered us both a cruise in one of their first-class steamers. It was my opportunity, Dr. Masters. I exchanged the original offer for a berth on board this ship."

I thought sourly of the little pale-faced woman gazing up with such wistful hunger out of the shadows of the quay-side.

"Your wife must have been disappointed, Mr. Boldwyn."

"I am accustomed to disappointments of that nature. It was to me a matter of duty——"

"To try issues with the captain?"

He smiled his little, pale, confident smile.

"I'm afraid such an idea must seem very absurd to you."

"Not at all. It's not the body but the spirit that matters—eh, Mr. Boldwyn? I have noticed the change on the ship already."

"I'm glad of that. Yes; after that night either the captain or I had to predominate in Dudich. I think in time we shall reach an understanding. Captain Guffry will realize that sheer brute force is not the only force in the world."

"You infernal little bully!" I thought. And I could have patted the *Miranda* on the deck, for she, at any rate, was beyond his mastery. She was rolling like the drunkenest sailor that had ever reeled down Dudich High Street in its palmy days, and I could see the greenish pallor creep back into Mr. Boldwyn's cheeks. Aloud, I said:

"It must have been a sacrifice. To spend a holiday away from your family—those nice little girls——"

He rose at once. Either the *Miranda* was too much for him or he felt the reference to his children to be slightly indelicate.

"My calling demands sacrifices."

"And the girl?" I asked.

He stayed to overwhelm me with a look of absolute rectitude.

"I found her a home in a suitable institution," he said. "As a Christian, I could do no less."

I STOOD that night on the bridge with Captain Guffry. It was dark and stormy, and the *Miranda* chugged and pitched her way through the steady head wind in her most ungainly fashion. The binnacle-lights threw a warm glow up into the captain's hard-bitten, resolute old face. Here, at any rate, he was master, and I was glad of it. I had hated to see him so humiliated on his own ship.

"How do you think the whelk's enjoying this—eh, Captain?"

He gave me a queer, one-sided glance.

"Been talking, hasn't he?"

"Quite a lot."

"Hm. Poor little Kitty Blake——"

"But, I say—she—er—she did, didn't she?"

Guffry's answer was illogical and satisfactory. He swore.

"Oh, yes, she did. Damn him!"

We were in Oporto two days, but Mr. Boldwyn did not go ashore. He stood occasionally on the shore side and looked at the place with an aloof disparagement. It seemed that he had never been abroad and did not want to go. England was enough for him, and sightseeing in more or less disreputable foreign parts was not his business. On the other hand, he was no fool. I got that clear in our subsequent conversations. At college he had swept all before him. He had written a commentary on the Fourth Gospel which was already a standard work. Dudich, after all, meant only a stepping-stone.

"I mark time there," he explained. "I am not suited for that kind of work. My sermons are above the heads of my people, and in any case organization on a large scale is more suited to me."

"A diocese?" I suggested slyly.

He cast a really comically unconscious glance down at his thin legs.

"One does not pry too much into the future," he said.

But I knew that he had seen the episcopal gaiters as in a prophetic vision.

This was the Reverend Evered Boldwyn who saw Santa Monica at sunrise.

I could not guess what had brought him on deck so early, for he could not have known, as I knew, that in that unearthly, translucent light of morning, Santa Monica would look like a fragment from the Book of Revelation which had somehow wedged itself between a sapphire sea and the crest of the high hills, clad in rich olive and festooned with ropes of shining orange groves. The walls of the white houses gleamed with the radiancy of alabaster, and one knew that the streets must be paved with jasper. It was impossible that a macaroni factory should be the *Miranda's* real concern in the midst of such fairy loveliness.

Mr. Boldwyn was leaning against the taffrail, gazing at it all with a curiously prim, repressed expression.

"Not quite of this world, eh?" I asked.

He did not care for my way of putting it.

"It seems pretty," he said.

But later on he consented to come ashore with me in one of the cockle-boats which bobbed hopefully about the *Miranda's* flanks in quest of passengers. It was manned by a handsome brigand, and it was typical of Mr. Boldwyn that, though he knew no word of Italian and I was a fairly fluent scholar, it was he who conducted the bargaining. He did it pretty well, too, without noise or loss of dignity. He held up his fingers to signify the extent of his offer, and held them immovable through the wildest eloquence until his enemy, with a gesture that called heaven to witness the shamefulness of the bargain, capitulated. Then Mr. Boldwyn climbed calmly down the ship's side.

I could see that he was pleased with the incident. He had power over men—the power of the spirit. Even here, where no one knew who he was, it did not matter that he was small and insignificant-looking.

I shall never forget that brief transit. It remains for me one of those strangely outstanding episodes in life which one can never look back upon save with emotion. I think when I am dying I shall see again those ethereal colors and hear the drip of the oars like a distant tinkling music. A peace beyond understanding breathed over us like a benediction. Even our brigand felt it. His indignation had blazed up and gone. He looked at us kindly.

"*Molto bello, signor,*" he said, and waved a brawny, eloquent arm round the world.

I doubt if he was even clean. He was too black and brown for one to feel any certainty on the matter, and his clothes were made up of unrecognizable fragments, like the sails of a fishing-smack whose patches the sun and wind have stained to a dozen mellow shades.

"*Molto bello,*" he insisted eagerly.

Mr. Boldwyn met his eye coldly, and the ruffian broke into the wide, unshadowed smile of an amused child. I could see how disconcerted Mr. Boldwyn felt under that radiance. For one thing, the man had tried to cheat him, and, for another, people never smiled at him like that. It was insolent—an encroachment on his personal dignity. His thin mouth tightened. He stared back without a flicker of expression. Our boatman laughed and shrugged.

"*Inglese!*" he said. "*Non capisce——*"

But Mr. Boldwyn did not like that, either. He had understood. It was the boatman who had failed to understand.

"The man's half-witted," he said, with more emotion than I had ever heard from him.

TAKING Mr. Boldwyn as he was, I can forgive his feelings toward Santa Monica. As we approached, it was like lifting a veil from a face that you had supposed beautiful and meeting the lewd glance of some scandalous old harridan. The jasper-paved streets were cobbled and strewn with refuse. Its houses looked at once to be indestructible and on the brink of tumbling about their own ears. They climbed the hills in straggling terraces; they grew out of the rocks; they sprawled and lounged in the warmth, like the idle good-for-nothings who lived in them and who now watched our boat like a flock of placid vultures. Their colors were the stains of lime and dirt which the sun had used for its artistry. And out of the open doors issued smells of garbage—of garlic—of heaven knows what.

I think Mr. Boldwyn would have turned back. But it was too late. Our boat ground against the stone steps of the little breakwater and we were delivered up. A dozen brown hands received us, and a moment later Mr. Boldwyn stood like a lonely, beruffled blackbird caught by a tatterdemalion crowd of noisy, voracious sparrows. He looked at me, and I have never seen an expression of such mingled disgust and chagrin and impatience.

"Are they *all* beggars?" he asked.

They looked like it. If there was any one working that day in Santa Monica, he had hidden himself in the macaroni factory. The quay swarmed. Some were worse than others. They displayed horrible infirmities with a brazen air of satisfaction. They seemed indecently unaware that they were making Mr. Boldywn sick.

"*Soldi, signor; soldi!*"

"*Carozza, signor; carozza?*"

The owner of the so-called carriage with the fleshless horse must have been brother to the boatman. He had the same passionate eloquence, the same limitless optimism. He followed Mr. Boldwyn, gesticulating and clutching him by the arm. I knew that Mr. Boldwyn loathed being touched. I could see his expression. He turned involuntarily to the little undersized *guardia regia* in the shabby uniform, and the *guardia regia* looked back placidly.

"*Soldi, soldi, signor!*"

"Good God!" said Mr. Boldwyn.

The children were the worst. They buzzed about us, barefooted and grimy, their rags fluttering in festoons behind them and their voices rising to a shrill, nerve-racking chant. Their leader was like a monkey, with a monkey's eyes of wicked innocence. One brown leg was withered and twisted, but he danced agilely in front of Mr. Boldwyn, his dirty paw extended.

"*Soldi, soldi*——"

I put my hand to my pocket. Mr. Boldwyn stopped me.

"No; certainly not! It's disgraceful."

He was shaking, and there was perspiration of sheer nausea on his pale face. I think as nearly as ever in his life he lost his temper. He made a sweeping gesture of dismissal, and the monkey-faced baby lost his balance and rolled over in the dust. A chorus of sound rose. It might have meant anything in Mr. Boldwyn's ears. Perhaps he expected to be stabbed in the back. Probably he was past caring. He went on blindly, and as suddenly as the hubbub rose, it died away. His persecutors returned to their former placid contemplation, lounging against the walls of the quay or stretching themselves on the sun-baked steps like drowsy yet alert lizards

"Thank God!" said Mr. Boldwyn.

There was only one pursuer. We both heard him. The uneven tap-tap followed us up the winding coast-road, growing fainter and fainter till, with the little panting, dust-choked voice, it seemed no more than an echo in our brains.

"*Soldi, soldi, signor*——"

I would have stopped and thrown him his precious *soldi.*

"He tumbled," said Mr. Boldwyn. "It's a sort of blackmail."

And it shows his power even over men who disliked him as bitterly as I did that I did not so much as look back.

And presently there was no sound at all.

WE HAD reached the point where the highroad drops down into the plain of Pompeii, and there was the bay before us like a floor of sapphire. Mr. Boldwyn brushed the perspiration from his face. He did see that it was beautiful, and I think he was glad to be sure that its beauty was a snare and a delusion.

"It's like sin," he said. "Beneath that fair seeming, nothing but rot and ruin."

Neither of us could have guessed that at that very moment his fate and the fate of the white baby rabbits and their pale, gentle mother and perhaps of Kitty Blake and even of Dudich hung in the balance.

We were not alone. A man was seated on the wall. Apparently he was an artist painting busily, and to me, who recognized him, not without a sinking of the heart, there was something pathetic in that bowed, earnest figure. It was as if he were afraid the scene before him might vanish into nothing—or as if life were too short for all he had to do. Then suddenly he heard Mr. Boldwyn's voice. In a trice he was off his perch and limping toward us, and in the outstretched hand were his masterpieces — post-cards — crude and ludicrously painted water-colors—smears not even dry.

"*Ecco—signor—ecco*——"

He himself was tattered, filthy. A grimy beard half covered a withered old face out of which peered one eye—one astonishingly bright and eager eye.

Mr. Boldwyn shrank back in horror.

"*Ecco, signor;* wa-ater colorès—wa-ater colorès, *signor*——"

"No, no!" said Mr. Boldwyn.

He was livid. But the demon of obstinacy had risen up in arms. He was not to be badgered by a loathsome beggar. He held his ground, intolerant and outraged, while I stood by, like a false friend, hoping the old man would not recognize me. And, strangely enough, he did not even look in my direction.

"Wa-ater-colorès, *signor*——"

"I don't want them," said Mr. Boldwyn.

The old man seemed puzzled, a little hurt, but very patient. He displayed other varieties of his art. He held them in a better light.

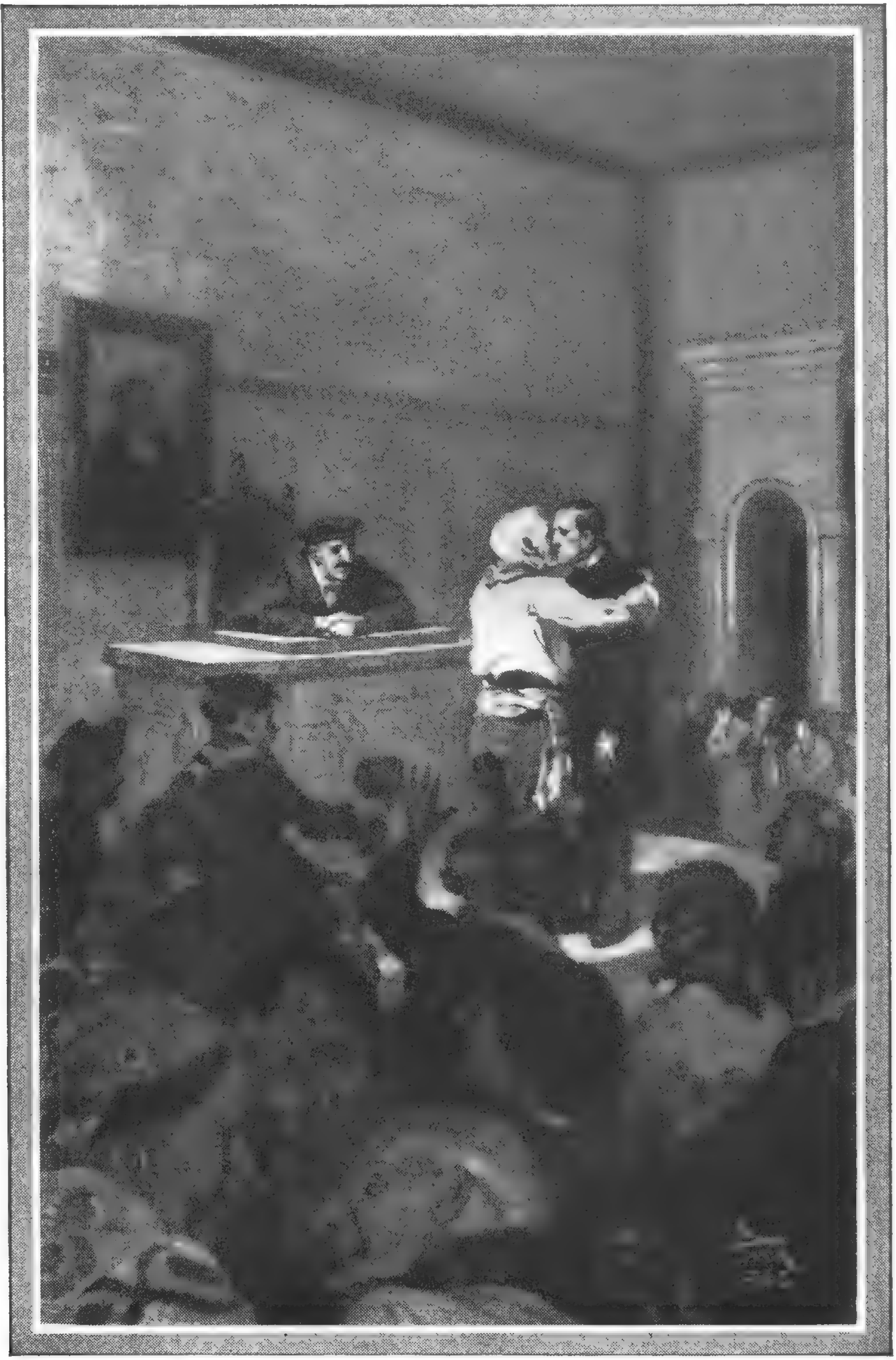
"Ver' chip—wa-ater-colorès—ver' chip, *signor*——"

Mr. Boldwyn maintained silence and, sighing, his tormentor returned to his extempore easel and his labors. He painted passionately, like one inspired, but when we turned at last to go, he accepted the movement as a signal for renewed hope. He waved to us.

"Wa-ater-colorès, *signor*—ver' chip——"

"It's like a nightmare," said Mr. Boldwyn.

Yet one other little incident was to complete his sense of outrage. It was dusk as we made our way back—a romantic dusk, shimmering with color, in which anything might happen—and as we passed a house built out of the rock I looked up, and at the barred but open window I thought I saw the pale gleam of a woman's face. I heard a



Then the beggar ran to Mr. Boldwyn and put his arms about him and kissed him.

laugh—and a whir as of the fall of a dead bird. It was a rose. It fell just at Mr. Boldwyn's feet. It lay in the dust and shone there like a bright yellow jewel. And Mr. Boldwyn stared down at it and then at me. I could have laughed out loud—and yet there was something ridiculously sad about it, too. No one had ever thrown a rose to him before.

"Really—really—" said Mr. Boldwyn, and passed on.

But I picked up the rose and kissed it to the high-up window. It seemed the least that I could do and, coward that I was, I knew that Mr. Boldwyn could not see me.

AT MIDNIGHT, three days later, the *Miranda*, obese with macaroni, was to lift anchor and turn homeward, and in the afternoon Mr. Boldwyn went ashore for the last time. His destination, as he explained to us with an air of one seeking out the barbaric customs of a heathen people, was the Campo Santo, perched like a great white bird on the hilltop.

"And may they bury you there!" Captain Guffry muttered.

But as dusk grew to night he sought me out.

"There's some row or other going on ashore," he said anxiously. "You can hear it from here. Maybe the whelk's been making himself too popular. I wish you'd go."

There was certainly a row. It sounded as if some one had stirred up a hornets' nest with a stick, and the thought of rescuing Mr. Boldwyn from the results did not appeal to me. I went reluctantly. At the breakwater a man met me and half dragged me ashore.

"For the love of God, *signor*," he panted, "if you would come at once——"

I ran with him, asking no questions. Thinking of the white baby rabbits and their mamma made me run quite fast.

The rest is Mr. Boldwyn's story as he told it to me under the stars.

Mr. Boldwyn has been ashore every day. He loathed the place. Its dirt, its smells, its undisciplined, happy-go-lucky ways revolted him. I think he went to the tawdry Byzantine cathedral just to see the people spit on the marble pavement and to feel that such things could never happen in his parish. Besides, the place had challenged him, just as Captain Guffry had done, and he would never have believed in himself again if he had funked the issue.

But Santa Monica was a tougher enemy than the old captain. For one thing, the inhabitants neither knew nor cared that Mr. Boldwyn was the friend of a director or that he ran a parish like a regiment or that he had written a commentary on the Fourth Gospel. To them he was simply a member of that pathetically mad but opulent tribe of *Inglese*, who bulged with *lire* and who at any moment might burst like a cloud and scatter manna over them. They never lost hope.

Most hateful of all to Mr. Boldwyn was old "Wa-ater-colorès." That one-eyed artist with his unsold masterpieces had taken up a place at the end of the breakwater so that it was impossible to come ashore without arousing the cry of: "Wa-ater-colorès—ver' chip—ver' chip—*signor!*" which never lost its accents of unalterable faith. And then there was the little boy with the crutch who hopped after Mr. Boldwyn along the dusty highroad like a wounded sparrow, chirping, "*Soldi, soldi, signor!*" till he could chirp no more.

I believe in his heart Mr. Boldwyn had murdered them both several times over—or confined them to a suitable institution.

Well, that last day he started out for the Campo Santo. If you know Santa Monica you know that to reach the Campo Santo is not the easy business it looks from the sea's edge. You start off along the Street of the Thousand Mills, with its rushing torrent at your elbow, and in five minutes you are in a rabbit-warren of dark, unsalubrious passages and steep stairways which seem to be leading into the bowels of the mountain. It was early afternoon when Mr. Boldwyn left the *Miranda*, but in those treacherous, mysterious byways it was dusk when it was not night. Here, too, the peculiar odors which had so disgusted Mr. Boldwyn had been imprisoned for generations and become unspeakable. So that at the end of an hour Mr. Boldwyn sickened of his project. He began to retrace his steps, but somewhere he mistook a turning, and after that he floundered up and down, now to the right, now to the left, beginning to move faster and faster under the urge of a mounting panic.

You have to imagine Mr. Boldwyn a

little man in a foreign land, among a people whom he knew to be sunk in viciousness, lost in wicked-looking, evil-smelling passages which ran in and out of cavernous, evil-looking houses. And the night coming on, already stealing like a black tide through the befouled channels, and overhead the fading glow of sunset. As Mr. Boldwyn ran up one flight of moldering, slippery steps and down another, faces appeared at the black, gaping doorways—malevolent, curious, astonished faces. And here and there an oil-lamp, to make the shadows blacker.

Mr. Boldwyn thought of the money hidden in his inner pocket. He thought of his wife and the two little pale girls. He wanted desperately to be back among them—back where his big, indomitable spirit could impose itself, where it wasn't so small and helpless and afraid.

Presently he had to stop. He was exhausted and could no longer hide the truth from himself. He was lost hopelessly. And just then a woman, like a ghost, came out of the gloom and peered at him. He spoke to her. It shows how terribly far gone he was that he spoke to her in English and that it never occurred to him that she could not understand. She, in turn, spoke to some one behind her, and in a moment the whole passage that had been wrapped in the silence of death came to life like a swarm of startled ants. Men and women and children crowded down the steps. They gazed at Mr. Boldwyn as at some startling apparition. They questioned him and the woman to whom he had appealed, and their voices grew shriller and more excited. They pressed closer against Mr. Boldwyn, jamming him against the wall in their eagerness to have a sight of him, and in the heat of their bodies and the stench of garlic he felt himself turn sick and faint.

"They are like beasts," he thought; "like beasts."

Then in that Dantesque inferno there appeared a familiar, one-eyed, detested face.

Even at that moment Mr. Boldwyn could not suppress a movement of exasperated aversion. There was something peculiarly hateful in that one, beaming eye. The mechanically uttered, "Wa-ater-colorès—ver' chip—ver' chip," made Mr. Boldwyn wince. Yet the imbecile came as a rescurer. He knew Mr. Boldwyn. He knew whence Mr. Boldwyn came. Mr. Boldwyn clutched at him. He took out his bundle of precious notes and displayed a whole five-*lira* piece.

"Cinque—returno—comprendo?"

It was all that he had the power to say. But the painter of post-cards had understood. He addressed the mob eloquently, and taking the shrinking Mr. Boldwyn by the hand, led him at the head of a giant procession, which lengthened at every turn of the passage till it seemed to Mr. Boldwyn that the whole town clamored sinisterly at his heels. He felt like a helpless victim of a bloodthirsty revolutionary mob driven to slaughter. He cursed himself for having shown that handful of money. He knew that they could kill him—no one would ever know how. His body cast into the torrent at the Thousand Mills would be out to sea in an hour.

Then suddenly it was over. They were in the market-place. There were the lights of the *Miranda*. There was the *guardia regia*, as shabby and as placid as ever. And Mr. Boldwyn alive and safe.

The first thing that Mr. Boldwyn felt was anger, broken up by all kinds of queer cross-currents of shame and disgust and resentment. If he hadn't been Mr. Boldwyn, one would have said that in that revulsion of emotion he became slightly hysterical. He had been afraid—he couldn't get away from that. This riffraff had frightened him—deliberately, with the devilish purpose of getting the better of him at the last. He had held out so long—and now they would get their *soldi*. Their dirty, greedy palms were already outstretched. And there was the five *lire* he had actually promised.

Mr. Boldwyn, pale but outwardly dignified, put his hand to his pocket. The money was gone!

THEN he knew. The whole truth broke in upon him like a flood of glorious daylight. It had been a plot. Every dread that he had suffered had been justified to the hilt. With the strength of his indignation, he threw off his tormentors. He gesticulated. It was extraordinary how eloquent his gestures became, and how, from being a mere helpless straw on the flood, he became suddenly the master, the dominating spirit, so that the tossing multitude fell back from him and the *guardia regia* burst into official activity.

"Chè cosa ha, signor?"

Mr. Boldwyn pointed with the steady finger of justice.

"That man has robbed me," he said. "Arrest him."

The *guardia regia,* who understood authority but no English, thereupon seized the one-eyed, open-mouthed painter of post-cards by the collar.

THE court of Santa Monica is just a fair-sized room which smells, like most official rooms all the world over, of stale tobacco, dusty deeds and fusty clothes. On that particular evening it smelled worse than usual, for the good reason that half Santa Monica was there. Those who had not been able to squeeze over the threshold hung outside the windows, peering through the bars like monkeys. Even the little lame boy had survived the struggle, and, perched on a friendly shoulder, gazed with wide-opened, startled eyes.

And there was something more in the room. It pounced on you like some invisible beast whose breath tainted the already stifling atmosphere with an acrid bitterness—rage, violence, passion lashing itself up to madness.

I had to fight my way through to reach the narrow clearing in which the real drama was being enacted. There, at a raised table, sat the *pretore*—I can see him now—a jolly little nut-brown man with a mustache that bristled in loyal imitation of the portrait hanging behind him, and in front of him stood Mr. Boldwyn and the *guardia regia,* the latter still holding on to what remained of his prisoner's collar.

One didn't need to look for the accuser. Mr. Boldwyn saluted me composedly. In that moment I confess I admired him. He was quite alone, and as far as I could tell there wasn't a man or woman in that room who didn't want to tear him limb from limb. And he knew it. And he didn't care. If they had fallen upon him and slaughtered his body, his great, indomitable soul would have been translated in triumph. You see, he was in the right. He had been in the right all through. No one had deceived him, and if he had been frightened for a moment, in the end he had reestablished his position. In this fierce mob he stood out with all the dignity and power of a pure and fearless conscience confronting evil.

"I'm glad you have come, Dr. Masters. You will help to elucidate matters. Please explain that this old man robbed me of a roll of notes—a thousand *lire* in all—which I had in my pocket twenty minutes ago. He was beside me all the time. There can be no doubt in the matter."

I translated obediently, with a tight, dry throat. The brief silence broke into a hiss of anger. The sea of humanity tossed fitfully, and here and there a white face was flung up like the broken crest of a wave. The *pretore* wrote diligently at his notes. But I looked at old "Wa-ater-colorès" and thought sadly, "My poor friend, why did you choose him of all people in the world?" And at sight of me his lips moved, and I was sure they were saying in a kind of dazed, agonized appeal,

"Ver' chip—ver' chip, *signor*—"

"Search the prisoner!"

I translated that, too, for Mr. Boldwyn.

"It will be useless," he said. "He had confederates in the crowd. There was no one else on that side of me. No one else could have taken it."

I translated. The *pretore* blew out his round cheeks.

"Quite so."

He blinked uncertainly. I could see what was in his mind. He, at any rate, didn't want to be torn limb from limb. On the other hand, it wouldn't do to have tourists offended, and a few weeks in the local jail would serve the prisoner right, anyhow. His mouth opened.

Then, for the first time, it seemed to dawn on old "Wa-ater-colorès" what was being done to him. He cried out. He appealed to us, wringing his hands. Hadn't the English *signor* asked him for his help and offered him a whole *cinque?* And hadn't he done his best—and got nothing for it? What was it that we all wanted of him?"

I felt my eyes burn. I said to Mr. Boldwyn between my teeth:

"Let him go. I know him. He's quite harmless. Drop the matter, for God's sake. I'll give you the money myself."

It was intolerably hot. In the yellow murk Mr. Boldwyn's colorless, impassive face glistened with sweat. And yet there was no impatience in his bearing—no desire for vengeance, you understand—just calm, overweening recitude. What a sermon he would make of it all one day!

"I'm sorry," he said. "But even here one must make an example——"

He drew out his handkerchief to mop his face, and the roll of notes fell to the ground.

IT WAS deadly still. I suppose we were breathing—all of us—but you couldn't hear it. Even the abject "ver' chip—ver' chip" had died into nothing. No one looked at any one. It was horrible—the most horrible thing of all—a kind of withering, vicarious shame, as though a fellow creature had been stripped naked before our eyes. But I was glad—fiendishly glad. I thought, "He'll never lift his head again."

That was what Mr. Boldwyn felt. He told me. He said it was as if he hadn't a rag left on him. He said he felt like a filthy beggar with all his sores and infirmities displayed to the world. His achievements, his intellectual and spiritual powers were as nothing to cover him. And for the first time in his life he saw himself for what he really was—a mean little man, with a mean, spiteful soul in a mean, ugly body. Perhaps if he hadn't suffered so much that afternoon—hadn't been frightened out of his life—the revelation wouldn't have come to him as it did. But his personality had been cracked—and now it shivered and broke and went all to pieces. He had been in the wrong. He had been vengeful and unjust and cruel. Before this mob of good-for-nothings whom he had despised he had been branded. He waited for their howl of exultant laughter. The sound of it and of their hatred and mockery would hound him to the end of his days. The poison of it would never be exorcised from his blood. He loathed himself. In his shame, he loathed the whole world.

He lifted his head at last. And there was old "Wa-ater-colorès" looking at him. And in the one dim eye was pity, compassion, infinite compassion and understanding. So they remained for an instant. Then the beggar threw off the hands that held him and ran to Mr. Boldwyn and put his arms about him and kissed him.

I don't quite know what happened then. It was as if a breath of clean sea air had blown in upon us. The next thing I remember clearly was Mr. Boldwyn holding "Wa-ater-colorès" by the arm and shouting something at the *pretore*—no one could hear what—Mr. Boldwyn crying openly, shamelessly, like a child. And at last, because, I suppose, no one could understand, he made a pantomimic gesture—an incredible gesture—of pouring something into a cup and drinking it to the dregs—of sweeping, reckless invitation.

The *pretore* bent over and shook Mr. Boldwyn by the hand and kissed him, too, on both cheeks. And the whole of Santa Monica burst into a shout of joyous understanding.

"*Viva il signor Inglese—bravo—bravissimo!*"

That was at six o'clock. At eleven-thirty Mr. Boldwyn came on board. He came down the breakwater at the head of a procession with some sort of band playing it didn't know what. And every boat in Santa Monica, weighed down to the gunwales, put out that night and bore Mr. Boldwyn home in triumph to the *Miranda.*

And from the taffrail Mr. Boldwyn addressed the multitude. I don't remember what he said. It's a pity, because I don't suppose he will ever preach a sermon like that again. But I can see him now, standing with his arms outstretched in a kind of universal embrace—his queer, lopsided little face transfigured in the starlight.

"Sh-shgentlemen and brothers: Shthis night I have seen God."

"He's very drunk," said Captain Guffry tenderly. "It's that *vino* what-you-call-it. A little goes a long way."

It was stifling in the cabin, so we laid Mr. Boldwyn near the fo'c's'le with his back to a case of macaroni and the wind in his face. And I stayed all night with him while the *Miranda* steamed homeward with the grim glare of Vesuvius staining her silver track. And Mr. Boldwyn held my hand and told me everything that had happened and cried a good deal.

Of course it was the *vino* what-you-call-it. And a great deal more.

At any rate, I often stay with the Boldwyn family. They are still at Dudich. The white baby rabbits have become quite charmingly aggressive children with a marked tendency to trample on their parents. And Mrs. Boldwyn has a laugh which she must have lost and found again.

They are all very much beloved. But I have my doubts about that bishopric.

Another story by I. A. R. Wylie will appear in September EVERYBODY'S.—Out August 15th.

Adventures A-plenty in a Search for Treasure

The Bucoleon Treasure

Hugh and His Friends, Preferring Finesse to Bludgeons, Are Outdone by the Rival Treasure-Seekers, Who Are Not So Delicate. When Betty is Kidnaped, However, They Adopt a Sterner Policy

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

Illustrations by Ralph Pallen Coleman

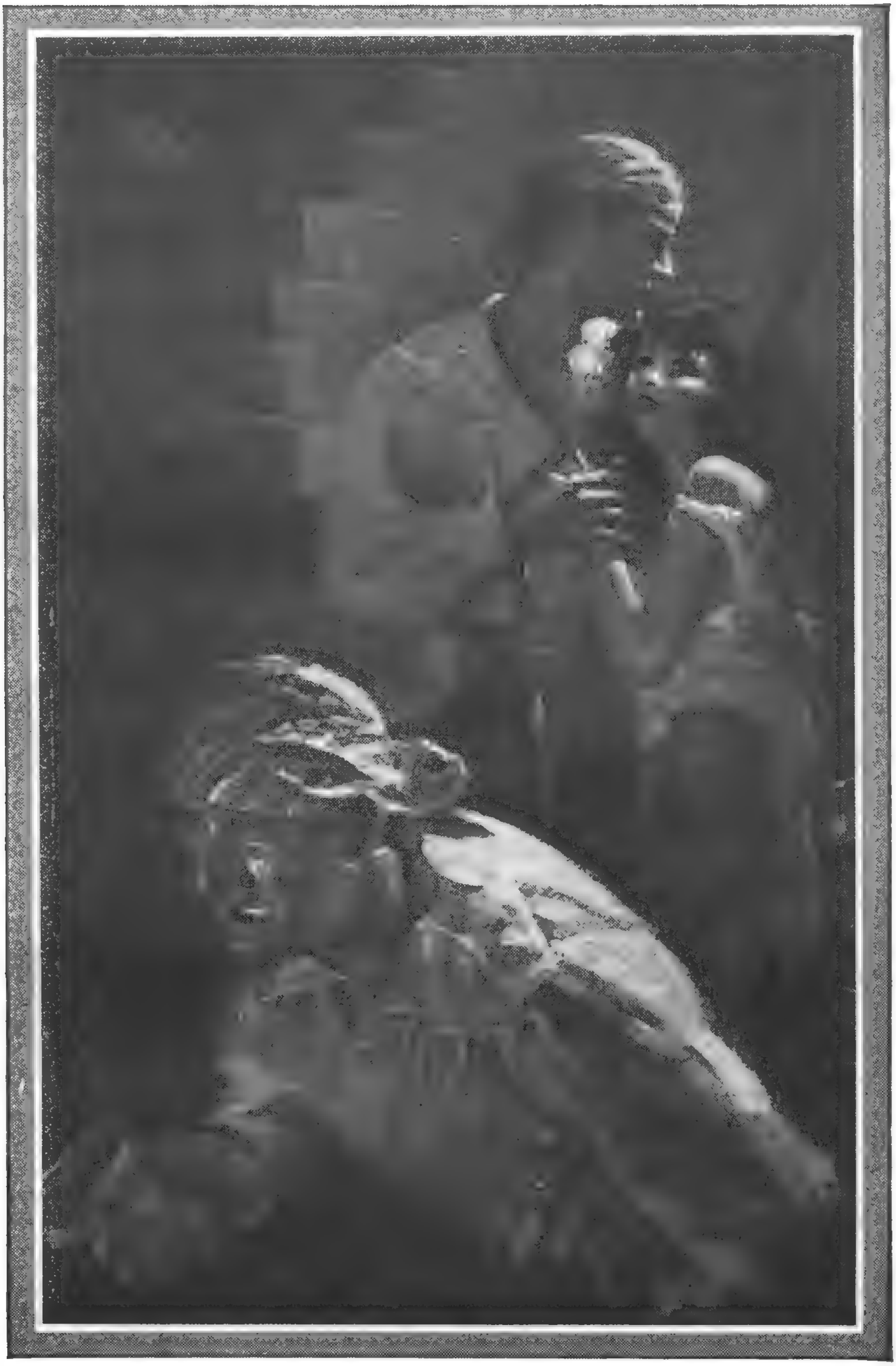
Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

NOW, here was I—John Nash, a perfectly respectable American—posing as one Jakka, a desperate outlaw, in the house of Beran Tokalji, a notorious Gipsy, in the city of Constantinople; and with me was my war-time pal, Nikka Zaranko, the famous Gipsy violinist, calling himself "Giorgi Bordu." And so successfully had we fooled the wily Tokalji that he had actually agreed to make use of us in his search for the secret of the location of the Bucoleon treasure—a secret which happened to be in our possession.

For we, too, were after the treasure, and that is why, by a clever ruse, we had managed to get in with Tokalji and his Gipsy tribe, who had their abode in a ruined fragment of the huge palace of the Byzantine emperors.

When the great war was over, Nikka, Hugh Chesby and I, for whom its horrors and hardships had welded bonds of the closest friendship, parted on the understanding that the call of danger would bring us quickly together again. And after a few years such a call had come, for Hugh was bent on retrieving the fortunes of his family, and to do this a very romantic and adventurous task lay before him. It was none other than to recover the Treasure of the Bucoleon, knowledge of which had for centuries been a closely guarded secret in the Chesby family. The treasure was the vast wealth amassed by the Emperor Andronicus Comnenus through rapine and extortion and buried by him in the palace grounds. He confided its location to Hugh's Crusading ancestor, for between the two men a strong friendship had developed. In the English baronial family the secret was lost for a long period, but was finally recovered by Hugh's uncle. The latter was assassinated just as he had completed plans for going after it, and Hugh succeeded to the title and a sadly depleted estate.

The latter circumstance decided the new baron to attempt to carry out his uncle's project, and Nikka and I were summoned to help him. Unfortunately, there were others who knew about the treasure and were equally eager to find it. Tokalji and his Gipsies were guarding the site, and with them was associated an organized band of international criminals headed by Toutou Lafitte, and composed,



Nikka gently released himself from her embrace, with the remark that this was no time to be talking of love, for we should probably all be dead within five minutes.

further, of two Russians, brother and sister, Count Serge Vassilivich and Countess Sandra Vassilievna; Hilmi Bey, a Levantine; Montague Hilyer, an Englishman, and his wife, and a dark woman of Latin type who spoke like an American and called herself Hélène de Cespedes. But we alone had knowledge of the supposed location of the cache, which was beneath a red stone in an inner court, near the Fountain of the Lion.

Toutou and his gang were hot on our trail. In fact, it was Toutou who had assassinated Hugh's uncle, and we realized that the same fate or at least torture in some form probably awaited us if the desperate criminals ever got hold of us and tried to force our secret from us. To baffle them, for a while, anyhow, we decided to separate on the way to Constantinople. So Nikka and I went from Piræus to Salonica, thence to Seres, where Nikka's uncle, Wasso Mikali, joined us. Hugh and Watkins, who had been his uncle's faithful valet, went straight to the city on the Bosporus. We met them there and also my archeologist uncle, Vernon King, and his daughter Betty, who were deeply interested in the whole affair and anxious to share its dangers.

As has been said, Nikka and I managed to get in with Tokalji, and were able to recognize the Fountain of the Lion. Tokalji had a foster-daughter Kara, who, very luckily, fell in love with Nikka. On our first evening there, in the midst of a wild fête, there came a loud knock on the street door.

Toutou and several of his gang had arrived. In spite of our disguise, Nikka and I were recognized.

"Run!" Nikka shouted, and we took to flight, making for a house on our left—the abode of the married people. Kara ran, too, and was with us when we had managed to fasten a door against our pursuers. Whereupon she proceeded to a demonstrative avowal of her passion for Nikka and her determination to help us. But he gently released himself from her embrace, with the remark that this was no time to be talking of love, for we should probably all be dead within five minutes.

But the girl led us to a room where, in a corner, stood a bedstead with ropes that served as springs. While Nikka proceeded to remove the ropes, I piled furniture against the door. Tokalji's men were in full cry down-stairs.

"There is more than enough rope here," said Nikka, coiling it on his arm. "Some of it I am going to use for you, Kara."

"What?"

Passion dawned in her big eyes.

"You cannot go with us, little one. We have no place to take you. And you do not know me. To-morrow you would cry your eyes out."

"I tell you I love you," she answered proudly. "I, Kara Tokalji."

"The daughter of my deadly enemy," reiterated Nikka.

"Oh, he is not my father," she said lightly. "No; I think I will go with you, Nikka."

"And I think you won't," retorted Nikka. "Here, Jack; catch hold!"

He cut the rope in two, gave me half, and with the remaining section approached her. She backed away from him.

"I'm not going to hurt you," pleaded Nikka. "But I must bind you, so they will not suspect that you aided us. Don't you see? And we could not run so fast with you."

"I can run as fast as the Frank," she declared. "But——"

"Our enemies will be here in a moment," warned Nikka.

She extended her hands.

"Bind me," she said wearily. "I love you, Nikka Zaranko. If I can help you in no other way, then I will help you by staying here."

HE BOUND her gently, hand and foot, without a word, and laid her on the floor by the bed. I ascended the ladder and pushed back the trap-door.

"You will come again?" she asked, looking up at him with mournful eyes.

"If I do, it will be as an enemy," he returned.

"Your enemies are my enemies!" she cried, struggling to a sitting position. "With a woman it is her man who counts. She cares nothing for the tribe—unless it be her man's. Now, you are my man, Nikka Zaranko."

Nikka stooped over her, and I scrambled up on the roof. I believe he kissed her. I heard his feet on the ladder-rungs and his voice, calling back:

"You are a brave girl. We will talk about this some other time, if the stars are kind."

"Oh, we shall meet again," she replied, her cords creaking as she dropped flat on the floor. "I am sure of it."

To me, he merely said:

"Hurry, Jack! Which way?"

But I reached down first and hauled up the ladder. The door was shaking under a shower of blows.

"Next house!" I panted, and we set off across the roof.

To our left was the inner courtyard, a well of darkness in which tinkled the Fountain of the Lion. To our right lay Sokaki Masyeri. Ahead was a drop of ten feet onto the adjoining roof, the difference in height representing the declining slope of the ground. We made it without any difficulty. The people in this house had been roused by the shooting, and we could hear their voices and movements. But we shuffled on cautiously until we came to their courtyard, which ran clear from the street-front to the old sea-wall.

"No choice," grunted Nikka. "Here's a chimney. Knot your rope. It can't be more than twenty-five feet to the ground."

"Why not slide directly into the street?" I argued.

"They might catch us coming down. Do as I say, and we can make sure whether the coast is clear before we leave the courtyard."

He went down first, and I followed him, scorching my hands, for the rope was thin and had no knots to check one's descent. I was in mid-air when I heard an exclamation beneath me and a thud.

"What the devil—" I started to whisper.

"Hist!" came from Nikka. "Don't say anything."

He was standing over an inert figure lying on the ground beside a half-opened door.

"Did you——"

"No; only belted him over the head with my pistol."

A woman's voice sounded inside the house, aggressively inquisitive.

"My God!" breathed Nikka. "She'll be out in a minute, and I can't hit her. We've got to try the street."

We stole through the courtyard to the street door. Behind us, Tokalji's house was seething with activity. Somebody, apparently, had just gained the roof. The woman inside the house we had invaded became impatient, and a light showed. My fingers fumbled for the latch; it seemed to me I would never find it. A scream rose shrilly.

"Let me try," said Nikka. "Here it is!"

He pulled the door toward us very slowly, and we peered into the street. Not a figure showed in the direction of Tokalji's house. Ahead of us only a kerosene-lantern burned in front of a coffee-shop on the corner where Sokaki Masyeri curved to the north. And the woman in the doorway of the house behind us was shrieking for dear life.

We sped out into the street, letting the door slam behind us. The noise distracted the attention of the woman from her unconscious husband, and she left him to run after us. We also made the mistake of taking the middle of the way instead of sticking to the shadows under the walls. And we had not gone fifty feet when we were seen by Gipsies on the roof of Tokalji's house, and they cried the rest of the pack hot on our trail.

AT THE corner by the coffee-shop I looked back and counted six in a tapering string, with more emerging from the courtyard or climbing over the roofs. Luckily for us, however, there was a four-way crossing a hundred yards beyond the coffee-shop, and Nikka turned left, away from Pera, toward which they would expect us to head. We would have been safe then if we had not blundered into a Turkish gendarme. He was naturally suspicious of our haste, and blocked the narrow way; but I gave him a terrific punch in his fat stomach before he could pull his gun.

We got by, of course, but his roars put the Tziganes right, and they followed the scent instead of losing it, as we reckoned they would. The only thing for Nikka to do in the circumstances was to twist and turn without heed to direction and lose both pursuers and ourselves in the breakneck slums of Stamboul. He finally succeeded in shaking off the Gipsies, but we were hopelessly astray, and it was past midnight when we found the khan of the Georgians and staggered through the gate.

Wasso Mikali wakened with the first knock on his door and admitted us. Smoking cigarette after cigarette as rapidly as he could roll them, he listened to the story of our adventures with avidity—although I discovered later that Nikka had suppressed Kara's part—and immediately despatched his young men to spy round Tokalji's house and learn the dispositions the enemy were taking. Then he insisted that we should sleep while he kept watch, and the last memory I have of that awful night is of the old Gipsy's figure stretched out on the floor, his back against the bolted door.

When we wakened, the sun was streaming in through the open door along with all the noises of the khan and many of its smells. Our guardian had coffee ready for us in a pot on the brazier, and his young men had sent in a report. The women and children had left Tokalji's house under escort of several of the men shortly after dawn. A vigilant guard was being maintained on the entrance, and nobody had come or gone—aside from the party of women and children—since observation had been established. Before sunrise our spies had heard the sounds of digging inside the premises.

Wasso Mikali looked doubtful as he imparted this last information.

"Perhaps they, too, have discovered the location of the treasure," he suggested.

"No," said Nikka, smiling. "They are burying their dead."

"Ha! That is a good thought to hold in the mind!" exclaimed the old Gipsy, immensely pleased. "What better pleasure could a man ask than to contemplate his enemies burying their brother that he slew!"

But instead of indulging in this Tzigane pastime, we decided to take our European clothing and adjourn to a neighboring Turkish bath, where we could remove the evidence of our Gipsy life.

"SO FAR, Jack, you and Mr. Zaranko seem to have had most of the fun," pronounced my cousin Betty, as we sat at luncheon in the Kings' private sitting-room in the Pera Palace Hotel.

Watkins, for the moment, acted as butler, and we were safe from inquisitive ears and could talk with freedom.

"What interests me," said Hugh thoughtfully, "is how many of those johnnies you scragged last night."

"Only the one, I think," replied Nikka.

"You hit another chap," I reminded him.

"Yes; but two doesn't mean any great reduction in their fighting force."

"Still, counting in those two and the men they sent off with their women, as Nikka's pals reported, they'll be a good bit weaker than they were," argued Hugh.

"Just the same," insisted Betty, "we ought not to run any unnecessary risks."

"Who's 'we'?" I inquired.

"See here, Jack," she flashed; "because you're my cousin is no reason you can bully me. You might as well understand that I am in this, and I am going to have my part in whatever we do."

"Hear, hear!" Hugh applauded servilely.

Nikka laughed.

"How about it, Vernon?" I demanded of my uncle.

He spread his hands in a gesture of deprecation.

"My dear Jack," he said, "you evidently have small acquaintance with the younger feminine generation. Betty is of legal age—I trust, my dear, you have no objection to the revelation of an intimate detail your sex is supposed to cherish in secret—and within reasonable limits her judgment is to be depended upon. Moreover, a not unimportant consideration is that she knows how to run a motor, and in our excursions in the *Curlew* her aid has been of some value."

"Don't be stuffy, Jack," urged Hugh. "Give the girl a chance. There are lots of things she can do short of mixing it with your friend Toutou. I gather that Nikka's lady friend in the hostile camp was not averse——"

"That's a different matter," I interrupted, perceiving the embarrassment on Nikka's face.

We had slurred over Kara's personal interest in his fortunes, but, even so, the incident, to quote Betty's analysis, was "romantic to the *n*th degree."

"I don't see that it is," asserted Betty stubbornly, "and I intend to play my part. You are short-handed——"

"You forget that Nikka has seven men hidden away in Stamboul," I reminded her.

"On the contrary, I take them into account," she retorted. "But you have all been saying that it is advisable not to use them except in a final emergency."

"That is true," agreed Nikka. "The more we bring into this row the noisier it will become. Also, as we decided before, we ought to have an ace or two in the hole. Take my advice and hang onto Wasso Mikali and his young men to the last."

"I'm not disputing you," said Betty, still belligerent. "What you say is only what I've been saying. But would you mind telling me why you are so set against using your Gipsies?"

"If we use them, there will be killing on a big scale," said Nikka succinctly. "That sort of thing is bound to become known."

"I met Riley-Gratton, the O. C. of the M. P.s, this morning, and he gave me a wad of town gossip," cut in Hugh; "but he didn't say anything about our lads' scrap at Tokalji's house."

"Oh, we can get away with that sort of thing once or maybe twice," returned Nikka, "but if we keep it up we'll run into trouble."

"No question of it," I said.

"Then what are we arguing about?" demanded Betty.

I laughed.

"Darn it all!" I confessed. "You won't let up; will you? Well, have it your own way. What do you want to do?"

"Run you down the Bosporus after dark for a look at Tokalji's house from the waterside," she answered promptly.

Hugh intervened.

"There's no question in the minds of you two chaps that any attack ought to come from the water-front, is there?" he asked.

"It couldn't very well come from the street," replied Nikka. "There's a high, windowless wall and a strong door, and even in that lawless quarter publicity would attend an armed invasion of private property."

"Of course," said Betty, her head in the air. "It couldn't be any other way. Now, tell us some more about the hiding-place of the treasure."

Nikka shrugged his shoulders and looked at me.

"What more can we say?" I answered. "There's the courtyard and the red stone."

"It's not hollow, you said?" spoke up King.

"No."

"That would indicate a task of some difficulty in prying loose the covering of the treasure-chamber," he remarked. "We have—or, rather, I should say, Betty has—taken precautions to install on board the *Curlew* an equipment of crowbars, pick-axes, shovels, chisels and other tools——"

"And a knotted rope with a grapnel on the end to help in going up the sea-wall," reminded Betty.

"True, my dear! Your forethought has been admirable. What I was about to say, however, was that a certain amount of time—I fear, perhaps, an inordinate amount of time—will be required to pry loose the covering of the vault. How are we to secure such an opportunity?"

"By choosing a time when the occupants of the house are off watch and their numbers diminished," declared Hugh.

"True," agreed Nikka. "Yet I confess I don't see how——"

And, to make a long story short, we hashed it over all afternoon until tea-time, without arriving at any clearer view of the outlook before us. By that time we were sick of the discussion, and voted to suspend. Vernon King and Betty went to a reception at the British high commissioner's, and the rest of us planned to take a walk on the chance of running into Wasso Mikali, who had promised to come over to Pera in the afternoon if his spies picked up any additional information.

THE first person we saw in the hotel lobby was Monty Hilyer. He hailed us in front of the booking-office.

"I say, Chesby," he drawled in tones that reached all the bystanders; "I don't know what sort of lark you fellows were up to last night, but really, you know, you can't take liberties with natives in the East—and especially with their women. Really, old chap, you ought to be careful. In your place I think I'd clear out of Constantinople. No knowing what kind of trouble you may get into."

Hugh was furious. He looked Hilyer up and down with cold scorn.

"Are you taking a flier in blackmail by any chance?" he asked deliberately.

"Not yet," answered Hilyer cheerfully. "No knowing, though. Matter of fact, at present I'm protecting some poor natives who fear they are going to be victimized by a gang of foreigners."

"Well, whatever you are doing, I should prefer that you keep away from me in the future," said Hugh. "I can't afford to have the Jockey Club stewards hear that I've been talking to you."

As it happened, the one episode in Hilyer's piebald past that irked his pride and roused sore memories was his suspension from the privileges of the turf. He was cynically indifferent to every other charge brought against him. But the man was a sincere horseman. His racing ventures had been the breath of life to him; his disgrace and the necessity for entering his thoroughbreds under other men's colors had been a bitter blow. And he showed this feeling now. His face went dead white.

"All right, Chesby," he said curtly. "I won't forget that." And he disappeared into the bar.

"Curse the rotter!" muttered Hugh.

"You were hard on him," said Nikka seriously. "After all, why should you mind anything that he can say?"

"He was hoping that Miss King was within hearing-distance," retorted Hugh. "He said what he did deliberately to smear us all. A dog like that doesn't deserve consideration."

"Some people believe a dog does deserve consideration, Lord Chesby," said a voice behind us.

WE TURNED to face Hélène de Cespedes. The Countess Sandra Vassilievna was with her. Maude Hilyer, her face as white as her husband's, was hurrying away from them.

"You may be enemies, but why should you make a woman cry?" continued the Russian girl.

"I'm very sorry," answered Hugh stiffly; "but do you sincerely believe that her husband is entitled to insult me in public?"

"It was a rotten thing that he said," admitted Hélène frankly. "And, of course, he is a rotter. But, as I told you boys once, they are a queer pair, and Maude—well, she really thinks that if they ever get to a state of affluence they can both turn round and live straight. It's very silly, but—do you believe in fairies? Those who don't generally envy those who do."

"We don't believe in fairies," I answered good-temperedly, "and we also don't believe in letting a man who is a thief get away with a gratuitous insult."

"Oh, you're right," said Sandra Vassilievna impartially, "from your own point of view. But I'm going up to tell Maude that she'll only ruin her complexion if she weeps for what an offensively honest man says to her."

Hélène laughed as the Russian woman walked off.

"Women are almost as funny as men; aren't they?" she said. "Oh, say—before I forget it, Mr. Nash, you want to look out for that girl's brother. You slammed him one or two in that fight at Chesby, and he's had it in for you ever since. And after last night all the men are wild. If that Gipsy, Tokalji, catches you—phew! And Toutou!"

"They weren't able to catch us last night," returned Nikka.

"You put up a great fight," she agreed. "Oh, I'm handing it to you—all of you! You're the best little bunch I ever ran across. Say; I wouldn't believe an English lord could be as much of a hustler as you, Lord Chesby. Your uncle, he—" She shrugged.

"What about my uncle?" asked Hugh eagerly. "Do you mind telling how your push got onto him?"

"N-no; I suppose there's no harm now," she answered slowly. "Poor old fellow! I was darned sorry he was croaked. We none of us— Well, what's the use of talking? That Toutou is a devil. Mr. Nash knows it. I only hope he and the rest of you don't get to know him any better. But about your uncle, Lord Chesby—he was a cinch. He ran round here like a kid in a game of cops-and-thieves. Everybody knew he was up to something. The authorities thought he was just a nut. But when he took to snooping round Tokalji's house, our folks got wise to it he might be on to something good. Tokalji's tribe have always had this tradition of a treasure—But you know about that. Tokalji had been working with us since before the war, and he realized this was more than he could tackle by himself. So he called on Toutou. The rest is what's going to happen."

"And that?" asked Hugh, grinning.

"My dear young lord, you'll lose your shirt—if not your life," she retorted airily.

"Tough luck!" said Hugh. "But your people have got to do better in that case."

"You're dead right," she agreed. "Say, Mr. Zaranko; on the level, now, did that girl of Tokalji's sell out to you last night?"

Nikka stared at her blankly.

"We had a good deal of trouble with her," he returned. "Had to tie her up. She was right on our heels with her knife."

Hélène shook her head.

"Ye-es; that's true. But—I saw her this morning. Humph. Maybe I'm a fool. I told Toutou to mind his own business and not mix into the tribe's affairs. Tokalji said she was all right, and that ought to be enough."

"God help Toutou if he went after her!" I said facetiously.

Hélène gave me a quick glance.

"Maybe you're right," she said. "I've often wondered what Toutou would do against a woman who used a knife. He gets 'em in a different way. Well, I'm babbling, which is a sign of old age. Be good, boys, and give up before you get into serious trouble. As ever, your well-wisher, Hélène." And she tripped off.

"What a delightful criminal!" I remarked. "Somehow, I don't mind so much the idea of being plucked by her."

"You're losing your perspective," growled Hugh, who was in a righteous frame of mind, partly because he was in love and partly because of his clash with Hilyer. "A crook is a crook. They're all against us. I don't know but that the women are the most dangerous where you are concerned, Jack. Why are you so damned susceptible?"

At which I laughed. Nikka, walking beside us, had no ears for our conversation. His thoughts were on that slim brown Tzigane maid about whom Hélène de Cespedes had inquired. But he woke up a block farther on when a big turbaned figure shambled past us, with a guttural exclamation from the corner of his mouth. At the next corner there was a traffic block, and we grouped casually round Wasso Mikali.

"Tokalji's women and children are in camp beyond Boghazkeui, on the edge of the Forest of Belgrade," he murmured, staring at a fat Turkish pasha who was rolling by in a Daimler. "There are five men with them. Five other men have left Sokaki Masyeri since morning. If Franks were there, they have gone."

"It is good, my uncle," returned Nikka, affecting to speak to Hugh. "Continue the watch. If there is more to report, bid one of your young men lounge before the khan where we are staying to-morrow in the forenoon."

"It shall be done," said the old man, and he elbowed his way through our ranks, as though in haste to cross over.

I looked behind for the inevitable spies. There were several Levantines on the corner in European dress and tarboosh—and Hilmi Bey, who pretended that he was not noticing us. His attitude was that of scorning to spy, and hating to have it supposed that he could demean himself to so plebeian a phase of crime. I called a greeting to him in derision.

"Are you walking our way?" I asked.

"I have a house in the Rue Midhat Pasha," he answered effusively. "I am going to visit my wives. Don't let me detain you, gentlemen. I turn right at the opposite corner."

"A vain dog," commented Nikka sourly, watching Hilmi's plump back. "He was afraid to be caught in such an ordinary undertaking."

"Well," said Hugh, whose temper had improved, "it goes to show that criminals are human beings. Every one of these birds seems to have some sense of shame if you can only pick out the right point of contact.

WE LED our escorts—for we took it for granted that we were under observation—a dilatory stroll, and arrived back at the Pera Palace in time for dinner, which, as usual, we had served in the Kings' sitting-room. It was a leisurely meal, for we had time to kill. There was an early moon, and we wanted it to set before the *Curlew* left the Golden Horn.

After Watkins had brought the coffee, Betty excused herself. She returned in a quarter of an hour dressed in a warm sport-suit instead of the light evening frock she had worn, and carrying two boxes of cartridges.

"Have you all got your pistols loaded?" she inquired. "Watkins? Daddy?"

"I think so, my dear," answered her father absent-minedly. "I wish, Jack, that you had observed more carefully the carvings on that colonnade. It may be truly ancient or— What? What is it, Betty?"

She deftly frisked him and examined his automatic.

"Yes; it's all right," she said, returning it to him. "And for heaven's sake remember, dad, that the safety-lock is on. Here's an extra clip. Watkins?"

Watkins set down the tray of coffee-cups and cautiously hauled his weapon from a hip-pocket.

"Quite right, I think, ma'am, Miss King," he replied.

"Here's an extra clip for you, too, boys."

"You don't catch old campaigners like us with empty weapons," I jeered. "It isn't we who'll be getting into trouble."

"I wish I could be sure of that," she retorted. "Most likely I'll be trying to pull you out of a scrape twenty-four hours from now. But let's get started. We have a car at the side entrance to run us down to the man-o'-war landing, where the *Curlew* is moored."

If the spies were still watching the hotel, as I have no doubt they were, I think we gave them the slip. We went down-stairs together and shot into the closed car which was in waiting, Watkins sitting beside the chauffeur. Ten minutes later we drew up on the *Curlew's* dock, secure from observation because of the British marine sentries who stood guard at the dock gates.

The *Curlew* was a handy craft, decked over forward, with a roomy cockpit and a good, heavy-duty engine. Betty, who was an experienced yachtswoman, automatically assumed command, and Hugh and Watkins as automatically accepted the rôles of crew.

"Lay for'ard, Hugh, and slacken that bowline," ordered Betty energetically. "How is the engine, Watkins? Very well; turn it over."

There was a splutter, and then the steady "put-put-put."

"Cast off that bow line, Hugh! Lay aft, Watkins! Is the stern line slack? Pay out! Let go! Get out from under my feet, Jack. No, daddy; you can't have a cigar—nothing but running-lights. I'd douse those if I weren't afraid of the navy people."

We chugged slowly through the glut of shipping in the Golden Horn, edging away from the Galata shore toward the picturesque bulk of Stamboul. Seraglio Point loomed ahead of us, high, rugged, tree-covered, dotted with infrequent lights. We rounded it, the lighthouse twinkling on our starboard beam, and turned southwest into the Bosporus, with the wide sweep of the Marmora just ahead. To port, the outline of Scutari and the suburbs on the Asiatic shore showed dimly. To starboard, Stamboul towered, white and ghostly and serenely beautiful, more than ever the magic city of the "Thousand and One Nights."

"Have you the night-glasses, Hugh?" questioned Betty. "See if you can make out St. Sophia's minarets." And to us: "That's our first landfall in making Tokalji's house. Watkins, I think it ought to be safe now to douse the running-lights."

Hugh leaned forward across the cabin roof, eyes glued to the glasses.

"Right-o!" he called back. "I'm on them—and I can see that big old tower of the sea-wall that lies this side of the jetty."

Betty cut off the engine.

"Fetch the sweeps, Watkins," she whispered. "We'll pull in. Quiet, everybody."

Hugh and Watkins unlashed two heavy oars from the cabin roof and thrust them outboard through oar-locks riveted to the cockpit railing. Side by side, in unison, they pulled with a long, deliberate stroke while Betty steered. It was no easy task to move that launch across the swift-flowing tide of the Bosporus.

"Nikka and I can relieve them," I offered, as the rowers began to pant.

"You haven't done it before," answered Betty shortly. "You might splash."

Indeed, the oars made hardly a ripple as they were lifted, feathered and dipped, tedious as was the effort.

"Much farther?" Hugh gritted between clenched teeth.

"The jetty is right ahead," Betty reassured him. "You had better get for'ard, dad, and be ready to fend off the rocks."

Vernon King climbed up on the cabin roof and crawled into the bow. Nikka and I strained our eyes, endeavoring to identify the details of the shore. To the right, and already a little astern of us, was a huge round tower, one of the bulwarks of the ancient walls. Other than this, there was only a dim range of masonry—the city walls, for the most part—crowned by houses. Not a light showed opposite us.

PRESENTLY, letting our eyes drop lower, we descried immediately in front a low breakwater—a jagged pile of rocks that ran out from the shore in the form of a blunted hook. Betty, steering carefully, brought the *Curlew* inside the hook and bow on to the shore, so that the launch was protected from the current that flowed through the strait. King scrambled ashore and made fast a line round one of the rocks, then felt his way back along the slippery footing of the breakwater and stepped into the cockpit. Hugh and Watkins unshipped the sweeps and laid them on the cabin roof.

All of us were staring at the blank darkness of the shore-line, tense and watchful, but my uncle's interest was still largely of an antiquarian nature.

"Do you appreciate how extraordinarily fortunate we are to have this ruined jetty to moor to?" he whispered excitedly. "No galleys in the old days were ever able to assail these seaward walls because of the currents. Without protection, we, too, would be smashed to pieces if we tried to lie under them. But this place here evidently was one of the walls of a harbor for the imperial galleys. It was, of course, fortified. This hook terminated in a strong tower. A second hook——"

"Daddy, daddy," remonstrated Betty, "you aren't lecturing to-night. We're reconnoitering the enemy's position."

Hugh had been studying the shore again through the night-glasses.

"Not a sign of life," he murmured. "Now, you chaps show us the lay of the land."

NIKKA and I, with the help of the glasses, plotted for the others the arrangement of Tokalji's establishment. There was the brick extension of the bachelors' quarters, crowning a part of the sea-wall. There was the gap between this structure and the House of the Married, which was shut in only by the crenelated height of the wall. And, finally, there was the House of the Married, with the Garden of the Cedars concealed within its heart, lifting its solid bulk above all adjoining buildings. There were no windows on the seaward face of Tokalji's house.

"The old wall between the two wings—between the bachelors' quarters and warehouse and the House of the Married—ought to be easy to climb," I concluded.

"The wall of the House of the Married is very irregular, too," added Betty. "We have passed it close in a number of times by daylight, and we all agreed an active man could climb it."

"That's a good idea," approved Nikka. "If you could enter by the House of the Married, you could seize the valuable part of the position first. Sound military strategy."

"Yes," assented Hugh. "You could consolidate your position—how the old lingo comes back, though!—and then occupy the rest of the place as convenient. By Jove! If you didn't want to occupy it, you could——"

"Oh, you'd have to occupy it," I interrupted. "I say—do you know that place looks deserted?"

"There's somebody there, never fear," rejoined Betty.

"According to Nikka's uncle, a good part of the garrison was withdrawn to-day," returned Hugh.

"Five went with the women," corroborated Nikka, "and five others followed them. Including those Jack and I accounted for, that does away with twelve. How many do you reckon were there last night, Jack?"

"Twenty, perhaps," I decided, after a moment's thought.

"Hardly more than our strength now!" exclaimed Hugh.

"They may have returned—some of them, anyway," Betty pointed out.

"There is no use hurrying," cautioned my uncle.

"There is good reason for striking when you are not expected," retorted Hugh.

Nobody answered him. We were all staring hungrily at the shadowy shape of the House of the Married towering above the sea-wall. It hypnotized us. We were enthralled by the unfathomable mysteries it suggested, by the knowledge of the mighty prize it contained.

"There's no time like the present," I said softly.

"Yes; they won't be looking for us so soon again," agreed Nikka. "They will be figuring that we had enough of a fright last night."

"Perhaps you are right." Vernon King surrendered. "Audacity, we are frequently told, is the favored bride of Fortune. I must admit that this place exerts a lure which rouses in me certain primitive instincts I had supposed were finally buried."

"You mean, dad," said Betty, "that you

feel like being foolish with the others."

"Oh, come, Bet!" protested Hugh. "This is no time for squabbling. What could be more unexpected than a raid from us to-night? They probably think, as Nikka says, that we will go slow after last night."

"Besides," I said, "their force is so depleted that we couldn't have a better opportunity."

"They may be reenforced."

"Nonsense!" said Hugh. "Watty, bring out those tools. We shall want the rope for climbing and a couple of crowbars. If we need anything else we can send back for it."

WATKINS, who had preserved a respectful silence throughout our debate, cleared his throat apologetically.

"I beg your ludship's pardon, but—but—you'll not be going into that den of thieves at this hour of the night, sir?"

"Certainly, Watty. It will be easier at this hour than in broad daylight."

"But—but—your ludship, Mr. Hugh, sir, it's flying in the face of Providence, if I may say so. There's no knowing what those devils 'ave waiting for you."

I am ashamed to say that we all chuckled as loudly as we dared at Watkins' fears.

"You can stay in the boat with Miss Betty, if you'd rather," said Hugh.

Without a word, Watkins dropped down the cabin hatchway.

"Why do you single me out to be left behind?" demanded Betty indignantly.

"Because, Betty, you can't climb that wall—and somebody has got to be ready to start the engine and get away in a hurry."

"I suppose you're right," she sighed. "Well, don't blame me if anything goes wrong. Of all the harebrained——"

"Rats!" I scoffed. "If they jump us, and there are too many of them, we'll retreat. But maybe we can clean up this job to-night for good and all. If we can, it's worth trying."

Watkins emerged from the cabin with the tools and the expression of a martyr. Nikka insisted that he was the best climber in the party and took charge of the rope. Hugh and I carried the crowbars, which we wrapped in sail-cloth to prevent their clinking against the stones of the wall. Then we stepped onto the slimy rocks of the ruined jetty, Nikka in the lead.

It was a perilous climb to the shore, and we negotiated it slowly, helping one another and taking every precaution to avoid making any noise. At last we found ourselves in the jumble of boulders constituting the breakwater at the foot of the sea-wall, which reared its mossy battlements high overhead. We turned to the left here and crawled over and through the rocks on the beach to a point under the overhanging wall of the House of the Married. From the beach it looked unclimbable, but Nikka, after surveying its mounting courses shattered and riven by centuries of neglect, by earthquakes and the ceaseless battering of the waves, removed his shoes and started the ascent, an end of the grapnel-rope looped round his waist.

We who watched him stood with knocking hearts for what seemed an eternity. Spread-eagled against the wall, he appeared as infinitesimal as a fly in the darkness. At first we could see him when he slipped and caught himself or sprawled or clutched for handholds. But soon he became an indistinct blotch on the masonry, and we held our breath, helpless now to aid him. Our first knowledge that he had succeeded came when he jerked up the grapnel lying on the beach at our feet. He hoisted it slowly, lest it clash against the wall, adjusted its prongs and tossed down the knotted length of rope.

Hugh followed him with ease, bracing his feet against the wall when he was tired. Then I went up. Then my uncle. Watkins came last. We stood, bending low, on the seaward verge of the roof over which Nikka and I had fled the previous night. It was now well toward midnight, and a haze was settling over the city. The *Curlew* was invisible even to us who knew precisely her location. The large courtyard to our right was a mere blot; the Garden of the Cedars in front of us was marked by the whispering tops of its two trees. The silence was absolute. The water lapped on the beach below. That was all.

Naturally and by right Hugh took command. It was his expedition.

"Do we go down through the trap-door Jack and Nikka used, or do we use the rope to drop directly into the garden?" he asked.

"Best use the trap-door," advised Nikka.

"Yes," I agreed. "Then the rope will always be handy in case you want to escape."

"Right-o!" endorsed Hugh cheerfully.

"Jack, you and Nikka will come with me. Professor King and Watty will be rear-guard and second line for emergency use. Stay where you are, Professor, until you hear from us."

"But do you consider it advisable, in full accord with military strategy, to divide your forces?" objected my uncle.

"We can handle twice our number," replied Hugh. "If there are more than that, we'll call on you. But you and Watty aren't as used to scrapping as we are, and it wouldn't be fair to mix you in if it can be avoided. Come on, lads!"

We crossed the roof toward Sokaki Masyeri, the large courtyard on our right, the Garden of the Cedars on our left. The trap-door was shut but unfastened, and Hugh lifted it. The ladder was in place under it. Hugh lowered himself gently and creaked down to the floor. We followed him. The room was in pitch-darkness, but we made certain by touch that it was empty. The bed from which Nikka and I had cut the cords lay exactly as we had left it, the clothes tumbled over the foot. The door to the hall was off its hinges, but propped in place.

"I've picked up a chair-leg," Nikka whispered by the broken door. "You fellows use your crowbars if——"

He paused significantly.

"Right!" Hugh whispered back. "Can we lift this door aside?"

The hinges rattled slightly as we shifted it. The next moment we peered through a yawning cavity, ears alert. Not a sound reached us, and we stole forward with the utmost care. Midway of this hall were the corkscrew stairs up which Kara had guided Nikka and me. I judged we were close to them when a door jarred beside us. There was a shout, and we were surrounded by a mob of half-visible figures. They poured from the head of the stairs as well as from the rooms opening off the hall in which they had lain concealed. They were all round us, but in the darkness they got in each other's way, and I thought we could beat them off.

A man seized me by the shoulder and I drove my fist into his face. Two others leaped on me. I swung my crowbar and smashed them aside. Hugh, in front of me, was driving his opponents down the stairs. I heard Nikka exclaim once, then a gasp—and a light flashed, three lights flashed. Hugh had cleared a space, but went down as I looked, throttled from behind. Nikka was just rising from beside a man whose head was crushed in. Then the rush began again.

I reached for my pistol, but did not have time to draw it. The attackers surged in from all sides. I had a fleeting glimpse of Hilmi Bey. Serge Vassilivich ran up the stairs. I heard somewhere the snarling voice of Toutou Lafitte.

"Jack, hold them for me!" cried Nikka. "Must warn King!"

I swung my crowbar in a circle and backed toward Nikka's voice. He had shaken himself clear.

"In that door—opposite—reach window!" he gasped.

We charged and split a path toward the door of one of the rooms. As we reached it, a pair of gorilla-arms wound round my neck. I tried to hit over my shoulder with the crowbar, but somebody caught my wrist. As I fell, I heard Nikka's cry:

"Run, Professor! Save Betty!"

That was all. Toutou had me on the floor and was choking the life out of me. I lost consciousness.

WHEN I came to I was lying on a very damp, hard floor. Several lights dazzled my aching eyes, and a number of people were talking in French.

"Ha! Nash is with us again," said Hilyer's voice. "I was afraid you might have done him in, Toutou."

"If you take my advice"—I recognized Hilmi Bey's falsetto tones—"you will have Toutou operate on all three of them. He has ways to make silent men speak. Do you remember Rattner, the Swiss broker, Toutou?"

Toutou's answer was an almost indistinguishable "guhr-rrrr-rrr-rr" of rage.

Alive now to the position I was in, I opened my eyes wider and tried to rise. But I was bound hand and foot and could not move. I could, however, see where I was. Not far away, Hugh and Nikka were propped against the wall. We were in a stone-walled and -paved chamber, which I suppose you could call a dungeon. It had no window. The one door was open. The floor sloped gradually toward the center, where there was a stone grating about two feet square.

But the most interesting aspect of my surroundings was the group in the doorway. Toutou stood in front, his green eyes sparkling with hate and lust. Hilmi Bey fawned at his elbow. Serge Vassilivich and Hilyer were there. Tokalji frowned at us, hand on his knife-hilt. Hélène de Cespedes and Sandra Vassilievna, in their modish costumes, looked singularly out of place. They lent a touch of unreality to what was otherwise a singularly brutish picture. As I looked, Hélène stepped forward.

"Help Mr. Nash to sit up, Monty," she said. Hilyer looked from her to Toutou. "Oh, it won't prevent his answering questions!" she snapped. "Please do as I say."

He raised me not ungently to a sitting position.

Hugh and Nikka grinned at me.

"The question before the house," said Hugh, "is what route to hades we are to take, and the preliminary stages of discomfort we shall undergo to satisfy the head devil over there and his assistants."

"You are in a serious fix," continued Hélène. "Joking won't help you any. I've tried to make you boys understand that the *boches* were merciful enemies compared to us. We don't recognize civilization. For us it doesn't exist. We have gone back to primal principles. Now we've got you, and you've got to talk."

"Words, words!" lamented Hilmi viciously. "Let Toutou take his knife to them. That will do the trick."

Tokalji evidently understood the purport of this, for he rasped a quick assent. Toutou flashed a long, stiletto-like blade and stepped toward us.

"I'll carve them," he purred. "Toutou's knife knows the way to truth. Soon they will be asking to die."

But Hilyer jumped in front of him. The Englishman's thin face was aflame with temper.

"I'll stand for a good deal," he said, "but I won't permit torture. You are a fool, Toutou! You'd only kill them the way you did the old lord. Here, you people; we must call him off. He'll spoil the whole show."

Sandra backed him up and compelled her brother, somewhat sullenly, to join in the protest. But Hilmi Bey and Tokalji took the opposing side energetically.

"They have killed two more of my men!" howled the Gipsy. "Shall they sow death through my tribe and live unharmed?"

"They shall," declared Hélène calmly.

She stepped beside Toutou and placed her fingers on his wrist. Her eyes sought his. He snarled in his catlike fashion and drew away from her. But she came fearlessly closer to him, and slowly, under the compulsion of her fingers, he returned his knife to its sheath.

"Hilmi Bey!" she cried. The Levantine bowed before her. "If you spoil this play," she said coldly, "I will kill you with my own hand. Keep out of what concerns your betters, pig!" He cringed to her and would have answered, but she silenced him with a wave of the hand. "There has been enough of this," she went on. "Mr. Nash, do you join with your friends in refusing to give up your secret?"

I nodded.

"Very well," she went on. "We will leave you to think it over. If you are wise, you will understand that, having blundered into this trap—as you must have blundered sooner or later—the best you can hope for is life in exchange for what we want. I cannot continue to save you from the cruelty of those of us who relish brutal measures. There is a limit to my patience, too. I advise you to make intelligent use of the next twenty-four hours. You cannot be saved. Your friends cannot reach you. The authorities cannot intervene. If they did, you would disappear. You have twenty-four hours more."

They took all the lanterns, except one, and went out, locking the door after them.

"WELL, this is a nice mess I got you chaps into," said Hugh unhappily.

"It's not your fault any more than it is ours," returned Nikka. "We walked squarely into a trap and were bagged."

"Were they ready for us?" I asked, with what interest my aching head would permit.

Hugh laughed with hollow mirth.

"That girl, Hélène, has an uncanny mind. She told the others, when their trailers reported they had lost us, to watch out for a raid on Tokalji's premises. They were so exultant over it that they blabbed everything. They didn't hear the *Curlew* or see her. They didn't know we were here until we raised the trap-door. But they were prepared for us, no matter which way we came. They had brought in every man they could trust. We didn't have a chance."

"Did the Kings and Watty get away?"

"Must have. Hélène and the others said nothing about them."

"I hope they will not try anything foolish in the way of a rescue," said Nikka. "If Wasso Mikali establishes touch with them, I am afraid they may be tempted to do something."

"There is nothing they can do," answered Hugh. "Our goose is cooked. We're *kaput*—finished." He hesitated. "They might drop us down that grating in the floor, toss us into the Bosporus the way Abdul the Damned used to dispose of his enemies. There are lots of things they could do with us. They will think that, even if they have to scrag us, they will still have the Kings and Watty to work on."

"Don't be too comforting," I observed, with feeble sarcasm.

Nikka roused himself.

"There is no sense in abandoning hope," he remarked. "Is this any worse than a *boche* barrage?"

"Good old Nikka!" said Hugh affectionately. "I say—if I had to make an ass of myself, I'd rather do it with two such prime——"

"Asses?" I suggested.

"Not even to you would I say that, Jack," he retorted. "By the way, lads, we're not running true to form. In every tale I ever read in which brave, resourceful men were made prisoners, they gnawed each other's ropes and so gained their freedom."

Nikka chuckled at this.

"If I tried to reach either of you I'd roll over on my face," he said. "I have already tested the knots round my wrists. It would take a strong man half an hour to untie them, and a very sharp knife to hack through them. The only way we shall be freed is by help from outside."

"That means not at all," replied Hugh. "Let's try for a nap. It must be some hours to daylight yet—not that that matters any in this dark hole."

We slept fitfully, frightfully harassed by the curtailment of circulation due to the straitness of our bonds and the discomfort of our positions, which we could not change.

Of course we had no means of estimating the passage of time, but we figured that it was well into the forenoon when we abandoned further efforts for sleep. Nobody came to us, and we began to be aware of the pangs of hunger and thirst. At first we paid little attention to this hardship, but as the hours dragged along we realized that our desertion could mean only one thing: that our enemies were determined to assail our courage with every weapon they had. And, to tell the truth, courage became something to grapple for after your stomach turned upside down for emptiness and your tongue commenced to thicken. To add to our misery, the one lantern left us flickered out, with a rancid stench of oil, and several rats discovered us. They feared us, perhaps, as much as we feared them. But their scamperings and sorties were nerve-racking, and we expected every moment to feel their teeth in our wrists and ankles.

FOR a while we talked and sang and told stories, but our cracked lips and swollen tongues soon felt the strain of vocal effort. What the others did then I don't know, but I fell asleep—to waken suddenly with a gasp of agony as I lost my balance and fell sideways, striking my head on the stone floor.

"Too bad!" came Hugh's voice from the darkness, strangely muffled. "Hit your head, Jack?"

"Yes," I moaned.

"Twenty-four hours must be nearly up," croaked Nikka.

I fought for a while to work over onto my back, but my limbs had become so stiff that I could not. I had to lie on my stomach, with my head resting first on one cheek, now on the other. In this position, ear to the floor, it seemed to me that I heard a clink of metal, not outside the door of the dungeon but somewhere underneath. I asked the others if they heard it, but they said, "No," and I could tell from their pitying tones that they thought I was becoming delirious.

Yet again I heard it, and almost immediately a wholly different sound—footsteps approaching the door. The two noises persisted together until the dungeon door was thrown open with a clatter. I forgot all about the first noise at sight of Toutou Lafitte, standing by himself in the doorway, his shirt-sleeves rolled up and a grin of horrible anticipation distorting his face. It was as if a mask of animal hunger cloaked his features. Their regularity was undisturbed. Each was in its usual place and relation to the rest, but their effect was entirely abnormal. They were warped and twisted by passions that must have rocked the foundation of the man's soul. His green eyes radiated an unholy light. His long arms were crooked and extended, his hands open and prehensile fingers hooked. He walked warily, bent-kneed, slowly.

In the doorway he stood motionless for a moment, surveying the three of us. Then he advanced, leaving the door open against the wall, and unhooked the stable-lantern which hung from his belt. He placed this by the grating and prowled over to me.

I say "prowled," and I mean just that. He walked like a big forest-cat, or, rather, like a gorilla, investigating a likely meal, awaiting the kill. When he stood by me I felt up and down my spine the shiver of apprehension, of sheer horror that I had known before in his proximity. When he turned me on my back and his powerful hands, with their smooth fingers and polished nails, explored my muscles, I could have screamed with terror. I twitched at his touch, with an involuntary exclamation of repugnance. He snarled, and his fingers pressed on a nerve of the upper arm with a force that made me faint. But almost at once he flung me from him and walked across to Hugh, who met him unflinchingly.

"I take it, Monsieur Toutou," said Hugh, "that the twenty-four hours are up."

Toutou stood over him, with that peculiarly animal, bent-kneed posture of meditated attack, arms flexed forward.

"Not quite," he answered in the throaty, guttural voice that I always indentified with him. "But we are tired of waiting."

He swooped and snatched Hugh into his arms, just as a gorilla might, squeezing ferociously. Hugh's face showed above his shoulder, white and beaded with perspiration. I thought the fiend intended to crush his ribs, but he ceased as suddenly as he had begun and tossed his victim down on the floor again.

"You shall come last," he growled. "First, you shall see your friends suffer."

Hugh was too weak from the handling he had just experienced and the shock of his fall to see what happened next; but I did. Toutou leaped on Nikka with one tigerish spring, lifting him to his feet and propping him against the wall. Then he prodded Nikka from head to foot, testing out muscles and joints, all the time growling in his throat. He did not hurt him, simply felt of him as though to determine the parts of his body which would be juiciest. Nikka's face showed revulsion, but no fear.

"Do you eat men, Toutou?" he gibed.

Toutou flashed his knife, and I closed my eyes, thinking to see the torture begin. But when I opened them again, the knife was slashing the ropes that bound Nikka's limbs. For a second I credited the incredible. Were we to be set free? But no. Toutou sheathed the knife and crouched before Nikka once more, animal-like, menacing.

"I am a bone-breaker," he rasped. "I break men, bone by bone, joint by joint. Have you ever felt your bones breaking, your sinews cracking? Guhr-rrrr-rrr-rr!"

He pounced, and Nikka screamed—screamed in an excess of agony as the beast's fingers sank into his shoulder, torturing the nerves, tearing the sinews and muscles, dragging the bone from its socket.

BUT there was another cry from the open door. With a whirl of skirts a slight figure darted in; a knife gleamed and plunged home, and Toutou started back from his victim, his own left arm dripping blood. His face was a queer mixture of rage, lust and puzzled alarm. Before him, knife in one hand, pistol in the other, stood Kara, eyes blazing with passion, breast heaving through the rags of her bodice, her slender body quivering with anger.

"You would dare!" she cried shrilly. "You would dare to touch my man! No man lives who can touch him while I live. He is mine, I say! Mine! I will cut your throat, big French pig! I will pick out your eyes! I will, I say! I will!"

She danced toward him so energetically that he gave ground before her.

"Go!" she cried, gesturing with her pistol toward the door. "Quick! Before I strike!" And she leaped at him. He clutched his wounded arm and retreated. "Go, I say!" She raised her arm to stab him again. "Did you think I would let you touch *him?* Did not the others say that you should only harm one of them? And you took my man! Oh, I will cut you in ribbons!"

And this time he turned and fled through the door, slamming it behind him. She was swift on his heels, jerked open the door and ran out into the passage after him.

"Run!" I heard her shout. "I am close to you! I, Kara Tokalji! My knife is at your back. Make haste!"

Then the door swung to and shut out the echoes of Toutou's retreat. My whole thought was of Nikka, his face green in the lantern-light. Hugh called to him:

"Nikka, old chap, pull yourself together. Can you get me unfastened? I'll see what I can do for——"

BUT I promptly lost interest in Nikka's plight. For my ear, which I could not lift from the floor, registered once more that peculiar clinking underground, this time more pronounced and nearer. I peered idly along the floor, watched a rat flit from hole to hole, and then stiffened with amazement as the grating in the middle of the room lifted two or three inches. It thudded into place again with a shower of dust, but at once the clinking was resumed and the heavy stonework was pried upward.

"Hugh!" I whispered. "Nikka! My God, look at the grating!"

Nikka was still too ill to understand, but Hugh stared at the grating, and his eyes popped from his head as he perceived its unsteady progress upward.

We were both afraid to speak, afraid to guess what it might mean. And while we still watched, uncertain, wondering whether to hope or to fear, we heard a loud grunt, the grating rose into the air, tottered and fell out of place, leaving the drain only half covered. The end of a steel crowbar appeared in this opening. There was another grunt, and the grating was levered aside.

"Where's that 'ere dratted box?" muttered a familiar voice. "If the servants' 'all could see me now!"

Two hands clutched the sides of the drain-opening—and Watkins clambered laboriously into the dungeon.

"If your ludship will pardon me a minute," he puffed. "This work does fair do me up—at my time of life and all, Mr. Hugh, sir—and the rats down there are as big as old Tom, the mouser in the dairy at Chesby."

We could only stare at him. Even poor Nikka forgot his agony and peered unbelievingly at this extraordinary apparition.

"'As that Tootoo gone, your ludship?" continued Watkins, looking round. He drew a pistol from his coat pocket. "Miss Betty told me to be sure not to shoot if I could 'elp it. But I'd 'ave took a crack at 'im if I could 'ave 'ad a look at 'im. But I couldn't rightly see down below there, and I was afraid 'e'd tumble to me if 'e 'eard me like, so——"

"For God's sake, Watty, where did you come from?" burst from Hugh.

"From the drain, your ludship. I nearly broke my neck in the opening last night, account of coming down the rope so sudden with the professor, and when I told Miss Betty, she said it was a gift from 'eaven and we must come back, which we did, your ludship."

"Do you mean to say," asked Hugh, "that there's a passage down there and Miss Betty is outside?"

"Quite right, your ludship," said Watkins, rising and beginning to dust himself off. "It runs out into the big rocks on the beach. The professor 'e says, sir, that it's a great discovery—it's a regular, sure-enough old Roman sewer. Miss Betty she said it was nothing of the kind; it was a gift from 'eaven."

"Well," I said, thrusting myself into the conversation, "this is no time for a debate. If you are going to get us out, Watty, you have got to move quickly. Toutou and his friends will be back any moment. One girl can't keep them away. I suspect they'd have been here by now if she hadn't precipitated some kind of a row."

"Very good, sir, Mr. Jack," answered Watkins, calmly producing a knife from his belt. "Such a necessity was duly foreseen, if I may say so." He went to work methodically on my lashings. "I trust you will take notice, your ludship, that all possible 'aste 'as been made. It was fair mucky below there, as you will see, gentlemen, and I barked my shins something cruel. Yes, sir, Mr. Jack; I'm going as fast as I can without sticking you. What a terrible place! And Mr. Nikka 'as the stomach-ache."

"He has worse than that, Watty," said

Hugh grimly. "Are the others all right?"

"Yes, your ludship. Ah, Mr. Jack, sir, there you are! One moment, sir, until I 'ave 'is ludship loose, and I'll give you a bit of a rub." He sawed away at Hugh's ropes while I slapped my cold legs with hands I could hardly move. "Why, your ludship, when we came outside we talked things over, and first off Professor King 'e says 'e's going in. But I pointed out to 'im 'ow somebody should stay with the young lady, and as 'e was 'er father and I was valet to your ludship, it was plain that 'e should stick by the launch, while I——"

"Never mind any more," Hugh cut him off, as he disposed of the last wrappings. "We can talk things over later. Help us to get our circulation back. Rub, man; rub! That's it!"

PRESENTLY we were able to walk stiffly. Our first concern was to lower Nikka into the drain. He was so weak that he took very little interest in the rescue. His initial flare of understanding was succeeded by a semistupor. His tortured shoulder must have been agonizing, although he never complained. We had Watkins go down ahead of him, and Hugh and I, between us, eased him gently through the hole, and Watkins caught him round the waist and steadied him. My instinct was to follow them immediately, but Hugh checked me.

"See here," he said; "now that we've got this secret entrance, why do we need to let the enemy know of it?"

"How do you mean?" I asked stupidly.

"Can't we cover up our tracks?" he pursued. "Here, Watty!" he called into the drain. "Hand up that crowbar."

Watkins extended it, a look of alarm on his face.

"I do 'ope, your ludship, you won't run into another mess," he remonstrated. "Best come along right away, sir, before Tootoo and 'is friends twig what we've done, sir. And I'll need some one to 'elp me with Mr. Nikka."

"You get started," returned Hugh. "We'll be all right, but we have a job to do first. Get on. We'll catch up with you."

Watkins retired, grumbling.

"If you'll permit me," I said uneasily, "I'm inclined to think you are mad. Personally, I don't hanker for Toutou's attentions. We may lose this opportunity if——"

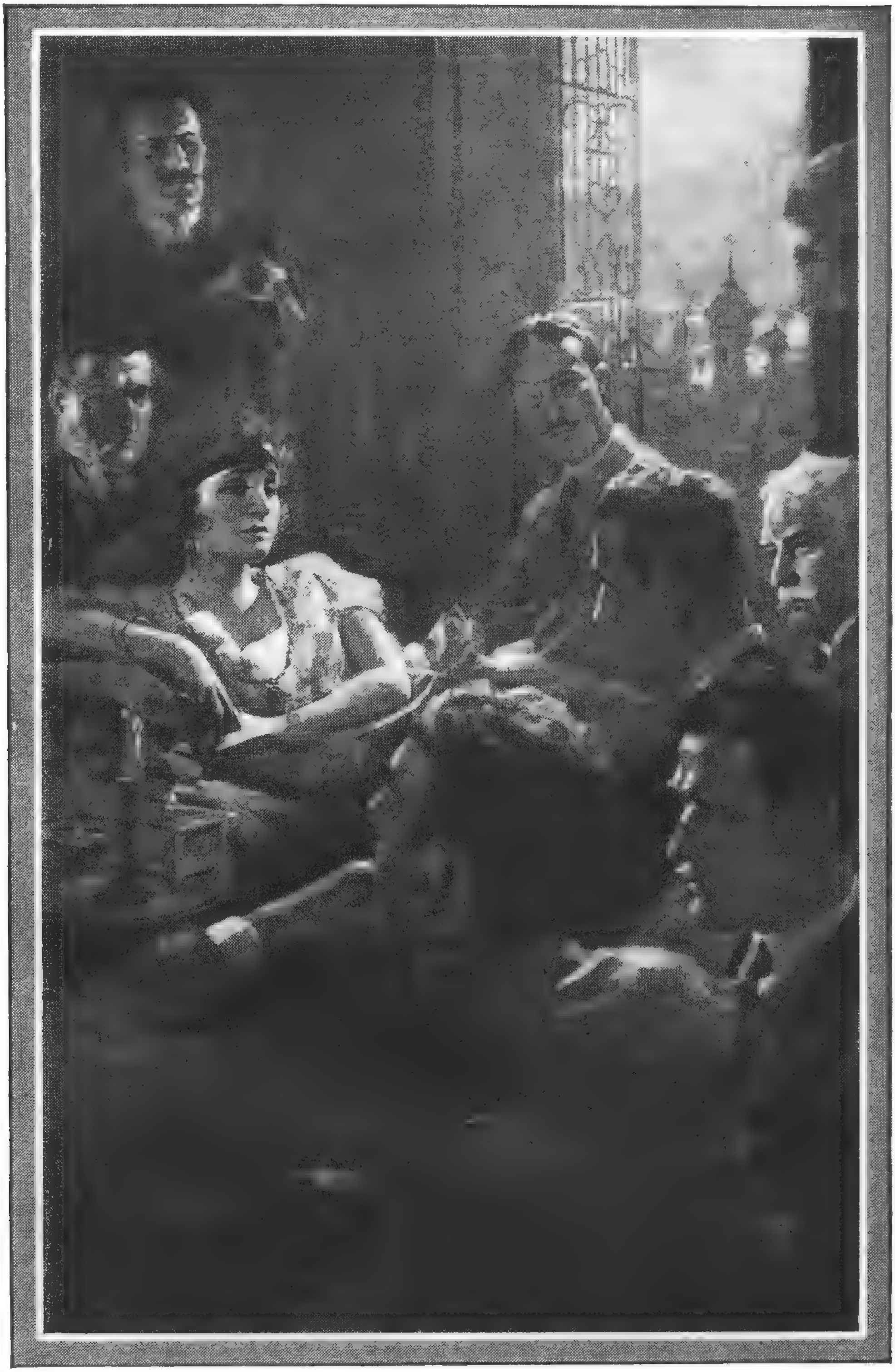
"We sha'n't lose this opportunity," answered Hugh, "and I hope we sha'n't lose the more valuable opportunity I'm looking for in the future. Help me break down the door."

Then I appreciated his plan. We worked the crowbar under the sill and between the jamb and the lintel, and with very little difficulty forced the door from its hinges. It was old and, although heavy, had warped and was poorly hung. As it came free we caught it and let it down gently on the floor. I crept out into the corridor and round a turn, where a flight of stairs began. Nobody was in sight, but I heard a distant murmur of conversation. To the left of the stairs a passage trended at right angles with a slight upward grade, and I followed it until I came to a clumsy door of planks. I listened at its crack, but heard nothing; so I applied my crowbar and forced the rickety lock. Beyond this door stretched a vast cellar which underlay the structure of the House of the Married.

I waited only to make sure that it was unoccupied, and then returned to the dungeon. Hugh had pushed the stone grating into position on the edge of the opening, leaving a space barely wide enough for us to slip through. We dropped down and found that when we stood on the empty packing-box which Watkins had fetched with him—for no special reason, as he afterward admitted, except that he "thought he might want to reach up like"—we could exert the necessary strength, with the help of the crowbar, to pry the grating into its bed.

And when this had been accomplished we hastened after Nikka and Watkins, feeling light-hearted for the first time in twenty-four hours, the longest twenty-four hours we ever spent. Ahead of us, Watkins' electric torch shone palely on the slimy, moss-grown walls. We splashed in water over our ankles. Big black rats scuttled round us. But we were at liberty, and we licked our puffy lips with our swollen tongues at the thought of the dismay that our enemies would feel when they reentered the dungeon.

Nikka fainted as we reached the mouth of the drain, which was fortunate for him, for it saved him the agony of the slippery climb over the rocks of the beach



"You're playing it too fine, Monty," Hélène remarked. "Will you talk on a fifty-fifty basis, Lord Chesby?"

and the ruined jetty to the *Curlew*. At its exit, the drain, or sewer, was blocked by a heap of stones about four feet high, across which it was difficult for men unhindered to pass in silence, let alone men carrying an inert body. But we achieved it finally, and stumbled as best we could onto the precarious footing of the jetty. The *Curlew* was simply a black shadow nestling against the rocks.

AS WE approached, two figures jumped from the deck, and the slighter of them ran toward us.

"Hugh!" came the whispered call. "Hugh, are you there? Are you safe? Who are you carrying, Jack? Is it——"

I came first, holding Nikka's feet. Hugh and Watkins, supporting his shoulders, were indistinguishable in the rear. It struck me as mildly humorous that Betty's first anxiety should be so ingenuously revealed.

"Hugh's all right," I answered cautiously. "Nikka's hurt, though. Keep quiet, you idiot!"

"Thank God!" she said inconsequentially, and sat down on the rocks and began to cry softly.

Hugh exploded in a sentimental curse.

"Here, Watty," he growled; "you'll have to manage by yourself."

"Very good, your ludship," muttered Watkins.

I felt Nikka's body sag, and looked back. Watkins was plodding determinedly after me, panting so loudly under his burden as to lead me to cast a wary eye at the dark bulk of Tokalji's house. Hugh and Betty had melted into a single shadow figure, from which came vague murmurs and gasped interjections.

"Damn!" I grunted. "What a hell of a time to pick for making love!"

"Quite right, Mr. Jack, sir," panted Watkins.

We were both about done up, for Nikka was heavy and we had to use superhuman care to avoid jouncing or dropping him on the rocks. But, luckily, Vernon King reached us, and with his aid we got Nikka into a bunk in the tiny cabin. Leaving King to take care of him, Watkins and I returned to the cockpit. I was fighting mad at Hugh for philandering and at Betty for picking such an occasion for tears. But my rage was not proof against the bubbling joy with which they greeted me as they hopped aboard.

"Meet the new Lady Chesby," whispered Hugh.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing?" said Betty. "Why, I had no more idea when I climbed out on those rocks——"

"No; I suppose not," I jeered. "Well, children, let me tell you you chose a poor time for this. If you want my congratulations, you must help us make a quick getaway."

"He's right," agreed Betty, tearing herself loose from Hugh's arm. "We are crazy. Jack, you loose the bow line. Watkins, are the sweeps ready? Prepare to cast off astern, Hugh."

Hugh and I were recouped with brandy and water, hot coffee and sandwiches, and fifteen minutes later, with the current to help us, we had worked out into the Bosporus and Betty judged it safe to have Watkins turn over the engine and switch on the lights. I am bound to say her first thought then was of Nikka. She put Watkins at the wheel, with orders to stand east at low speed, and ducked into the cabin with us. Nikka's eyes were still closed. King was bathing his head.

"How is he?" asked Betty.

"He has not recovered consciousness yet," answered her father. "To tell the truth, I haven't tried hard to bring him round. I fear his shoulder is dislocated."

Betty stooped over Nikka and felt gingerly of arm and shoulder.

"Yes," she said; "it's dislocated. I have seen dislocations pulled out in the hospitals during the war. I think I can get his shoulder back for him if some of you will hold him down. It's bound to hurt him cruelly for the moment."

She spoke with crisp authority. Her face was all keen intelligence.

"We'll help," Hugh told her.

She stationed us, Hugh bearing down on his other shoulder, Vernon King and I grasping each a leg. She took a deep breath, caught arm and shoulder in her strong young fingers, tugged, twisted with a wrench—a moan from Nikka, lying half conscious—and there was an audible snap. Betty stepped back, flushed and trembling.

"There!" she said. "It's in place; but I wouldn't do it again for anything."

"Good girl!" I said.

"That's praise from Sir Hubert," she acknowledged shyly. "Aren't you ever going to congratulate me, Jack? O Lordy, though, I've forgotten to tell dad!"

"But that's quite usual, my dear," said my uncle whimsically.

"Don't be a cynic, like Jack, old dear," she rebuked him, with a kiss. "You know I really have to tell you when I'm engaged. It happened very suddenly, and Jack blew me up for letting it interfere with business."

"I'm inclined to agree with him," said King. "I suppose the young man concerned is Hugh."

Betty regarded him admiringly.

"Why, daddy, that's awfully brilliant of you! However did you guess?"

Her father pinched her ear.

"Occasionally Elizabeth," he said, "you appear to labor under the misconception that I fail to take any note concerning the ordinary routine happenings of the day. But, if you prefer, I shall base my apprehension solely on analytical grounds. You leap ashore. You call for Hugh. You run toward him. You delay your reappearance. Immediately afterward you announce your engagement. I must maintain the sequence of causes prior to the effect presents an argument grounded on irreproachable logic."

"You win on logical as well as mere human grounds, Vernon," I said. "Bet, I congratulate you, minx though you are! If Nikka——"

And at that moment Nikka opened his eyes and sat up in the bunk, bumping his head.

"Ouch!" he yelled. "Where am I? What—" He rubbed his shoulder reminiscently. "I'm sore all over, but I have a feeling it hurt worse a little while ago. How did I get here?"

SO WE recounted to him the full story of our rescue, which, in turn, necessitated chronicling our adventures of the past twenty-four hours for Betty and her father.

"I imagined, of course, that a mishap such as you describe had befallen you," remarked King, when we had finished. "When Nikka shouted his warning, Watkins and I held a hasty conference on the roof and decided that your adjuration must have had sufficient urgency behind it to warrant our obedience, however reluctant we might be to abandon you. Upon Watkins' insistence, I preceded him down the rope. Prior to his own descent he loosened the grapnel, with an eye to the possibility of twitching it down, so that, when he was some eight or ten feet from the ground—my estimate, naturally, is hypothetical, as it was impossible to gain any clear view of his accident—the rope came free above and he was precipitated into an opening in the rocks which we had not hitherto perceived.

"I may say that we later determined in the daylight that it was practically invisible from the adjacent waters, and the hasty investigation I was able to make on my own behalf leads me to the provisional conclusion that we have stumbled upon a genuine archeological find. The ancient Byzantium, as you doubtless know, was a city vying with our modern capitals in comfort and hygienic convenience, and its drainage system must have been——"

"Yes, yes, daddy," interrupted Betty; "but you are telling about last night, not the ancient Byzants."

"Byzantines, my dear," corrected her father. "The byzant was the standard coin of value of the Eastern empire, indeed, of the known world."

"A thousand pardons, old sweetheart, but still—don't you see?—you've left the boys high and dry. Here; you'd better let me carry on."

"Very well," answered King, with the docility acquired by any man who spends much time in Betty's company. "Perhaps your narrative gifts will secure a more rapid description of our adventures."

"It's not my narrative gifts, darling dad. It's that I can stick to the path. You see, boys, I heard Watkins squawk when he fell. The only reason Toutou and his friends didn't hear him was that they were so busy with you. I left the boat and scrambled over the rocks—nearly scared dad to death. He thought I was an enemy. Watkins had disappeared into this opening. He had slid over the rock pile that fills it to within three or four feet of the top, and he had bumped his head badly. He thought he was in a cave, and I made dad get in after him and look round with a flash-light. So long as the rope and grapnel had come down, there was no way for Toutou's gang to trace us, and I was wondering whether we couldn't make future use of a hiding-place almost in the enemy's camp."

"I say—that *was* clever of you!" said Hugh admiringly.

We all chuckled, but Betty thanked him with a smile.

"Oh, I was a little heroine," she continued. "No movie star could have surpassed me. Dad took a look, and announced it was one of the old sewers and seemed to run inland beneath Tokalji's house. He wanted to follow it all the way in, but I decided there would be no opportunity for a rescue that night, and I made him and Watkins come back to the *Curlew* with me.

"We couldn't think of anything to do for you, short of going in ourselves and setting you free. We didn't know how to get into touch with Nikka's uncle and his Gipsy friends. Manifestly, we didn't want to tell the police or the British authorities —although we would have done that if we had been unable to get to you to-night. Watkins said that 'treasure or no treasure 'e wasn't going to see 'is ludship butchered like 'is uncle, whatever 'is ludship might say any time,' Oh, Watkins was lyrical, Hugh."

"He's done damned good work," assented Hugh gratefully. "Bless his old heart! So you just went up to Constantinople and lay doggo?"

"Just that. We debated hopelessly most of the day, and after dinner sneaked away and about ten, I think, took the *Curlew* and steered straight for Tokalji's house. And, oh, Hugh, if there hadn't been that opening from your dungeon!" The tears came into her eyes. "To think what Nikka had to stand! And you others would have had it, too."

"If there hadn't been that, there would have been something else," Hugh reassured her. "And now we have a secret way to follow directly into Tokalji's lair."

"But after you get in you will have a pitched battle before you can control the place," Nikka pointed out. "I don't see that you are likely to profit very much by it unless you are willing to put the issue to the proof by cold steel."

There was no gainsaying this argument, and none of us was inclined to advocate wholesale slaughter, not even Nikka, with his aching shoulder and memory of Toutou's brutality. So we found ourselves no nearer to a plan of action when Watkins called down the hatchway that the man-o'-war dock was in sight. It was then too late to find one of the variable Pera taxis, and we walked up through the deserted streets of Galata, tenanted only by homeless refugees. In the hotel lobby we said good-night—it was really good-morning—to each other, and went to bed to sleep the clock round.

TWENTY-FOUR hours' rest made us all fit again. Nikka's arm and shoulder were still lame, but he had Watkins rub him with liniment that suppled the strained muscles, and declared that he was as game for a fight as any of us. And when Watkins brought us an invitation to breakfast in the Kings' sitting-room, we were able to muster a degree of optimism, despite the difficulties of the situation.

"It boils down to this," said Hugh, over his second cup of coffee: "We know that the instructions are correct and that we have a desperate crew of criminals to reckon with. Our job is to trick Toutou's crowd."

"You can't trick them," snapped Nikka. "They are as clever as we."

"Then what can you do?" demanded Betty.

"Exterminate them."

"Your proposal, Nikka, seems somewhat —er—shall I say savage?" objected Vernon King.

"Last night you—" I began to say.

"I still feel as I did last night," retorted Nikka swiftly. "I don't want to risk any of our lives, treasure or no treasure, beyond what is essential to our safety. But we are fighting savages. You can——"

There was a knock on the door. Watkins answered it. His back stiffened as he peered through the crack.

"A moment, if you please, sir," he said coldly, refastened the door and turned to us. "Mr. 'Ilyer would you like a word with your ludship."

Hugh rose, his jaw set.

"I'll talk to *him* outside," he said.

Watkins opened the door and bowed him out. We heard his first icy words:

"To what am I indebted for this?"

Then the door closed behind him, and we looked at each other, startled, uneasy. Nobody said anything.

The tense silence lasted for perhaps five minutes. Then the door was reopened, and Hugh entered.

"Hilyer wants to talk terms," he announced. "In the circumstances, I didn't feel that we could afford to overlook any chance, and I have arranged that four of us will meet four of his crowd at Hilmi's house at three this afternoon."

"I don't trust the dog," I said immediately. "Why go to Hilmi's house? Why couldn't he talk here?"

"He said the only way he could prove that he has a certain trick up his sleeve would be for us to go there. He also pointed out that we need have no fear of treachery, as we only needed to leave word behind us where we were going."

"Why parties of four?" asked Nikka.

"Obviously we couldn't take Betty," answered Hugh, "and one of us ought to stay with her."

"If Toutou is there, I shall kill him on sight," warned Nikka.

"I told Hilyer we drew the line at that beast. Besides Hilyer and Hilmi, there will be only Hélène de Cespedes and Serge Vassilivich."

"I still don't see why we should go out of our way to talk to them," I grumbled.

"Hilyer seemed in a reasonable frame of mind," argued Hugh. "He said his crowd are sick of the whole business, that they as well as we are wasting time, and that we might as well compromise."

"I hope you have no such idea in your head!" exclaimed Betty. "You couldn't trust them in any event."

"No, I haven't—not yet, anyway," returned Hugh. "I told Hilyer we had no reason to be discouraged, but he just grinned. He said it was a stalemate. What I am after is to feel out the enemy's position."

None of us could think up a valid reason for objecting to Hugh's strategy, and it was agreed that he, Vernon King, Nikka and myself would keep the appointment at Hilmi's house. Betty said that she would take Watkins and go for a sail in the *Curlew*.

"I want to get away by myself and think out this treasure-puzzle," she added.

"Here's hoping you do!" said Hugh fervently. "You'll be safer on the water than anywhere else."

After luncheon we escorted Betty and Watkins to the man-o'-war dock, saw them off and then walked through Pera to Hilmi's house in the Rue Midhat Pasha. It was a handsome residence in the French style. As we approached it from the corner, a big automobile halted in front of the entrance and Hilmi himself appeared in the doorway, ushering out a stout personage, whose frock coat, fez and predatory visage proclaimed the Turkish official. The man hardly glanced at us—merely climbed into his machine and drove away. Hilmi, waiting us on the door-step, rubbed his hands together with an oily smirk of satisfaction.

"Your servant, gentlemen," he said, with mock humility. "Did you happen to recognize my guest who departed as you arrived?"

"No," replied Hugh curtly.

Hilmi had a peculiar effect on you. You didn't so much hate him or desire to kill him as you did hanker to kick him and stamp on him. He was a rat.

He saw this, and his smirk became a tigerish grin.

"Follow me," he snarled.

WE PASSED through a hall, carpeted and hung with gorgeous Persian, Bokhara and Chinese rugs, into a *salon* which was a bizarre combination of rickety French furniture and priceless, solid Oriental stuff. The rugs, as in the hall, were worth a fortune by themselves. Hilyer, Hélène and Serge Vassilivich were lounging on a couch, smoking cigarettes and talking in low tones. The men rose as we came in, Hilyer with a swagger, the Russian with a frown that presently focused on my face—he had never forgotten or forgiven the beating I gave him in the gun-room at Chesby.

Hélène lay back against a pile of cushions, a pleasant smile curving her faultless lips. But she made no move to greet us.

"Sit down, won't you?" said Hilyer, automatically taking charge. "Glad you came. Cigarettes? Cocktail? I assure you they're quite all right—taste 'em myself, if you like. No? Right-o! Did they see your friend, Hilmi?"

"He"—Hilmi pointed a finger at Hugh—"says he did not know him."

"Ah!" Hilyer lit a fresh cigarette. "Don't take my word for it, you chaps, but that man was Mahkouf Pasha, who is popularly known in this part of the world as the 'Grand Vizier's Jackal.' You probably do not see yet why you should be interested in him and his presence here today. The fact is, however, that his visit to this house was timed so that you should have an opportunity to see him. We particularly desired you to see him, knowing that you—ah"—he smiled agreeably—"might be inclined to doubt the veracity of whatever we said to you.

"To cut a long story short, Mahkouf Pasha is a particular pal of our fellow club-member, Hilmi. I don't mind letting you in on it that they've been in several deals together. Now, we owe you a bit on account—the other night, for instance. But I gather that you chaps haven't been able to ride clear on the strength of your activities as yet."

He paused, and Hugh caught him up.

"You have no right to suppose that," Hugh retorted sharply. "We aren't asking terms. You are."

"I notice you aren't refusing to discuss terms," said Hilyer, with a glint in his eye.

VASSILIVICH jerked a remark, which we could not understand, from the corner of his mouth, but Hilyer waved it aside.

"Go at the narrow ditch first, Serge. There'll be plenty of time for the water-jump. I'm not trying to bluff you and your friends, Chesby. I don't have to. As I told you this morning, I have an ace in my sleeve. Being a gambler, that's my habit."

"So I've heard," said Hugh, with cutting emphasis.

Hilyer eyed him curiously.

"You do get down on a fellow; don't you?" he commented. "As you know by now, there's but one way to dust me. You tried it once, and I haven't forgotten. Well, never mind. The fact is, you are stumped just as much as we are. We are plugging round the course, and neither one of us can jockey a horse clear of the field. It's damn nonsense. Gets nobody anywhere. Sensible thing to do is to lay cards on the table and make a deal."

"Put down your hand," said Hugh evenly.

"The treasure is somewhere round Tokalji's house," answered Hilyer promptly. "That's certain. To get to it you've got to get into Tokalji's house. What's more, you've got to be able to stay a while in Tokalji's house. And you can't do it. You haven't got a chance of doing it. But let's suppose a miracle happened and you found the chance." He dropped his cigarette and leaned forward, driving his clenched fist into his palm to emphasize every word. "Still we've got you stopped. How? Hilmi's friend, Mahkouf Pasha. We've made arrangements with him whereby in the event that we give up hope of any better deal we denounce you and your information to him. He will then convey the information to the imperial government, and in return for his public service and for our assistance he and we will be presented with a stipulated percentage of the treasure as recovered."

He sat back on the couch.

"Those are good cards, provided they are played right," Hugh admitted. "But how is the imperial government going to secure the treasure's location from us?"

"If they don't secure the information, you won't get the treasure. To be quite plain with you, our plan is to give you an opportunity to get to the treasure before calling in the government."

"Yes; that would be the way to do it," said Hugh. "What's your proposition?"

"Seventy-five per cent. to us, twenty-five per cent. to you."

Hugh laughed.

"I thought you wanted to talk business."

Hélène tossed away her cigarette.

"You're playing it too fine, Monty," she remarked. "Will you talk on a fifty-fifty basis, Lord Chesby?"

Hugh turned to her.

"I don't know," he said frankly. "I want to think it over. I'll admit that by calling in the Turkish government you could stall me—and yourselves. But what guarantees can you give us?"

"No guarantees we could give you would be binding," she answered, with an insolent smile. "What's more, we don't have to give guarantees. We hold the whip-hand. As to thinking it over"—she flung a glance at Hilyer, who nodded—"come back tomorrow. We'll give you that long."

"I'll take as long as I choose," returned Hugh, with a flash of temper—he, like the rest of us, was becoming restive under the realization that they did hold the whip-hand. "And, understand me—I mean what I say when I tell you that any compromise between us will be based on what we consider satisfactory guarantees."

Hilyer yawned lazily.

"Don't like it; do you? Well, suit yourselves. So far as we are concerned, remember we'd rather come to terms with you. We stand to get more out of you than from the Turkish government. But if you try to trick us, we won't be beyond denouncing you, even at the cost of losing any share at all." His teeth clicked, and his drawl became a measured threat. "Incidentally, this is not the only ace we have up our sleeve. Our terms will be stiffer to-morrow than they are to-day."

"That goes," added Hélène de Cespedes, rearing her lithe body erect, all pretense of languor gone. "That's legal tender, Lord Chesby. You people are backing a losing game. The cards are stacked against you."

"We'll see about that," said Hugh, rising, a spot of red on each cheek-bone the one sign of the white-hot anger that seethed within him.

"Must you go?" asked Hilyer, his drawl resumed. "*Au 'voir*, then. Hilmi, will you see 'em out?"

HILMI BEY bowed us out, his smirk more tigerish than ever. It seemed to us that he had a perfect right to enjoy our departure.

"Score for them" remarked Hugh, as we shook the dust of the Rue Midhat Pasha from our shoes. "We're chivvied—dished!"

"They won't do it," I claimed. "And if they did, it wouldn't get them anywhere."

"You're right," assented Hugh. "But there's the delay. This is expensive, Jack, and we can't hang on forever. If we could wear them out, why——"

"You are both wrong!" exclaimed Nikka energetically. "You must remember that you are in Constantinople. Things don't happen here as they do in Europe."

"Constantinople is in Europe," I objected—and promptly felt like the fool the remark demonstrated me to be.

Nikka favored me with a withering glance of contempt.

"We are not talking in terms of geography but of human nature," he said. "This is the Orient. You ought to realize that, Jack, after what you have seen with me. And in the Orient, and especially in Turkey, such a graft-deal as Hilyer made with Mahkouf Pasha would not excite any interest, much less condemnation."

"You forget the Allied high commissioners," interjected King.

"No, I don't. They can go only just so far. Their position is delicate enough without imperiling their prestige by interfering in what would be hardly a question of Turkish internal government. They'd know that a windfall such as this treasure would be used simply to further Pan-Islamic intrigue and bolster the coffers of the Nationalist government at Angora. But for that very reason they wouldn't be able to interfere. I tell you it would be the height of bad luck for us if the struggle for the treasure took on a political tinge. It would be fatal. We might as well pack up and go home."

"Guess you're right," assented Hugh thoughtfully.

"What puzzles me is why they didn't try something like this before," continued Nikka. "I fancy they wanted to be very sure of their man first."

"Surely they won't have told him," protested King.

"Who? Mahkouf? Oh, no! They're too wise. No; they've simply explained to him the general proposition and arranged tentative terms. They won't trust him any farther than they have to."

"Is it your idea that we've got to accept their offer?" asked Hugh.

"It's my idea that we've got to use our wits and act quickly," said Nikka.

"But you can't trust them!" I cried. "Hélène as much as told you so. We'd get the stuff out, and they would think nothing of jumping us, either by force or trickery."

"They might even stage a fake hold-up on the part of some government agency," Nikka added cheerfully.

"In plain language, their proposition is: Heads we win; tails you lose," said Hugh.

"Yes; supposing you permit them to take the lead from your hands," agreed Nikka. "However, I am reminded of a memorable address I was once privileged to listen to as a soldier of the legion. A general named

Foch read us a citation, and then told us how to go on winning more. 'I have noticed,' he said, 'that it is the soldier who attacks who wins battles. The initiative is the price of victory. Never permit your foe to assume the initiative. Attack. Always attack.' "

"True," assented Hugh. "And we've been able to stall their gang so far by taking the initiative."

"But if we can't?" inquired King. "Optimism is a desirable creed, but——"

"Optimism is all we've got," interrupted Nikka. "We've got our backs to the wall. This is the time to fight, if fighting will get us anywhere."

"If it will," echoed Hugh.

"That's what we have to decide," said Nikka. "You can't work out a problem like this in the street."

We walked the remainder of the distance to the hotel at a breakneck gait. As we entered the lobby, one of the clerks came from the office and accosted Hugh.

"Your messenger would not wait, milord," he said. "Mees King had not returned. Indeed, she has not yet returned."

"My messenger?" repeated Hugh, with a startled look at us.

"Yes, milord. He said he must see her. When I told heem she had gone out he left your letter for her, weeth instructions that I present it so soon as she came in."

Hugh's face creased into grim lines.

"Very well. As long as she has not yet returned, I will take it back."

The clerk went to the mail-desk and plucked an envelope from Betty's letter-box. Hugh thanked him and turned it over in his hand. It was addressed in an extraordinarily scrawling hand to "Miss King." In the lower left-hand corner was written: "By messenger."

"But it looks nothing like your handwriting!" exclaimed King. "I am at a loss to comprehend how persons as adroit as our opponents have demonstrated themselves to be could hope to secure success by means of such a shallow trick."

"We'll see," returned Hugh bruskly, slitting the envelope. "I have a notion this is the other ace Hilyer bragged about."

The envelope held a single sheet of paper. On it was written in the same hand:

DEAR BET:

I've broken my arm, which explains this abominable writing. I never could do anything with my left hand. Don't worry. I shall be fit in no time. Can you come with the bearer or, if that is not convenient, with Watkins, to Sokaki Masyeri? It's important. Can't write any more. HUGH.

P. S. The others are all right. We have a clear sweep. The bearer can't wait.

"Can you beat that?" I gasped.

"Exceedingly ingenious," murmured King. "Dear me, how fortunate it was that we returned when we did!"

"We mustn't leave anything to chance, though," said Nikka quickly. "You can't tell what other steps they may have taken to trap her. We had better go down to the dock at once."

Hugh glanced at the clock.

"Yes; she'd hardly be back yet," he muttered. "One moment—I'll leave word at the desk that she is not to go out, no matter what message she may receive, until we return."

He rejoined us at the door and we all entered a taxi which Nikka had impounded. Nobody said anything, but while we were jolting into Galata, Hugh produced his automatic and made sure it contained a full clip. At the dock there was no sign of the *Curlew.* None of the dock-attendants had seen the launch or anything of Betty or Watkins since we had waved good-by to them before three o'clock.

We waited a while, thinking they might show up, but after six o'clock King became nervous and persuaded us to return to the hotel. There, too, there was no word of them, and we began to worry in earnest.

WE TAXIED to the dock a second time. The *Curlew* was nowhere to be seen.

"Perhaps it would be advisable to hire a boat and search for them in the Marmora," suggested King. "Their engine may have broken down."

"We had better not split our forces," Nikka objected.

"Engine-trouble never would bother Betty," Hugh agreed. "Still, I don't like it."

"We are probably worrying about nothing," I said. "After all, it was a blessing in disguise that she stayed out so late. It insured against her being caught by that note in case we hadn't intercepted it."

"I'm not interested in 'if' and 'had'," snapped Hugh. "I don't like this delay. Those devils of Toutou's are capable of having an extra trick in reserve."

"I vote we go back to the hotel," proposed Nikka. "Maybe I can pick up one of my Gipsies. We could start them out on the trail."

Nikka's suggestion did not make anybody any happier. It indicated that he, like the rest of us, was beginning to take the situation more seriously than he cared to admit openly. But we climbed into the smelly taxi for the fourth time and were jounced out to Pera. The hotel people regarded us with some amazement when Vernon King again inquired for his daughter. No; she had not returned. Was anything wrong?

King hesitated, looked at us. It was hard to know what to say. Something might be wrong. And yet the chances were that the only thing wrong was a cranky motor. We didn't want publicity. We couldn't afford to attract unnecessary attention. Our party was sufficiently conspicuous as it was, and was taken for granted and let alone largely because it included an American millionaire archeologist and bibliophile and an English milord—both of whom, by all the rules of the Orient, were naturally assumed to be harmless lunatics.

"No," he answered finally; "I think not. My daughter has a reliable servant with her. I am simply anxious for her return."

The hotel management were all sympathy. *Monsieur* need not worry. Let him dine in comfort. The instant *mademoiselle* returned or word of her arrived, he should be apprised. In the mean time, why concern himself unnecessarily?

"They're right," said Hugh, as we grouped in the lobby, canvassing our next step. "We've had a hard day and we need food. Let's eat. By the way, Nikka, did you see your Gipsies?"

"No; and if anything much had gone wrong, I think—at least, there's a strong probability—they would spot it sooner or later and report to me."

"Obviously we have done all we can for the present," said Vernon King. "Hugh's suggestion is a good one. Perhaps food and a rest will sharpen our wits."

We went to the Kings' sitting-room, where we had breakfasted that morning, and sat down wearily discouraged, disheartened, more than a little dismayed. But, as my uncle had said, food and wine and black coffee brightened our despondency. We were on the point of deciding that the best policy would be to risk dividing forces, sending Hugh and Vernon King on a chartered boat to scour near-by waters while Nikka and I attempted to investigate Sokaki Masyeri, when Watkins entered unannounced.

HE WAS very pale. His collar was streaked with blood. There was an ugly bump on the side of his head. He dragged one foot after the other.

"Oh, your ludship!" he murmured, and dropped into a chair. At once he strove to regain his feet, but collapsed again. "I beg pardon, I'm sure, your ludship—no disrespect intended—fair dead beat I am, sir—my 'ead and all——"

Nikka seized a glass of champagne and carried it to him, holding the glass to his lips.

"Where is—" Hugh's tongue boggled Betty's name.

"They—they've—took 'er, your ludship," answered Watkins faintly.

"How? Where? Is she alive?"

King sprang from his chair, wringing his hands.

"O my God! She is all I have! What has happened? Where is she? Please tell me!"

"Wait a minute," said Nikka quietly. "He's all in. Give him food and some more to drink. That's right, Jack. There's a bottle of whisky over there. Pour a stiff dram into a cup, Hugh."

With stimulants to help him and a cold cloth on his head, Watkins regained control of himself.

"It 'appened so quick I don't rightly know 'ow it was," he said. "We 'ad run out toward the Princes Islands, and I saw there was little shipping round, your ludship and gentlemen. And then there was a fishing-boat with power bore down on us. Miss Betty and I didn't think anything about it until 'e was right on us. Even then we thought they'd only lost control of their rudder like. But when they bumped us and tumbled aboard, I knew they wasn't up to no good, your ludship.

"Miss Betty reached for 'er gun, and so

did I. But somebody grabbed 'er, and somebody else pushed me over; at the same time a chap lashed at me with an iron-weighted club. 'E thought 'e'd knocked my brains out, and 'e would, too, except that I fell so fast, on account of being pushed, that I was under the level of the rail when the club 'it me and most of the blow went into the rail. Splintered it, it did, your ludship. And but for that I wouldn't be 'ere."

"And Miss Betty?" questioned Hugh eagerly.

"I don't know, your ludship. When I saw anything again I was lying on the floor of the cockpit, dusk was coming on and the launch had drifted far out to sea. They'd stopped the engine. I don't know 'ow I got back 'ere. My 'ead went round and round. But I thought if I could get to you, your ludship and gentlemen, maybe we could think of something else to do. Just give me a chance to lay my 'ands on that 'ere Tootoo! I'll bash 'is 'ead for 'im."

"They did have a spare trick ready," commented Nikka. "Our visit to Hilmi was part of a plot to get hold of Betty. You see, they would have caught her whether she had gone sailing or not."

"You said this afternoon we had our backs to the wall," said Hugh. "You were right. They've licked us. Our only chance is to clean them up."

At that moment the telephone-bell rang. King answered it.

"Send him up," he said. And to Nikka, "A Gipsy asking for you."

"That will be Wasso Mikali!" cried Nikka. "He must have learned something. I thought he would. Don't be downhearted, Hugh. This hand is a long way from being played out. It is as I thought all along—we have got to meet savagery with savagery. It is a case of kill or be killed."

"But Betty!" exclaimed Vernon King. "Think of her! What will they——"

"I am thinking of her," retorted Nikka. "If we hope to rescue her we must strike hard. Give them time; let them strengthen their position—and she will go to some harem in Anatolia or to a procurer in Salonica. I tell you, I know. We are dealing with men and women who have no mercy, who fight like animals, who are animals. Well, from now on, Nikka Zaranko will meet them on their own ground."

THERE was a knock on the door. Wasso Mikali entered, his garish Gipsy dress in striking contrast to the Western furnishings and our own conventional garments.

"I greet you, son of my sister," he said calmly. "My young men, watching in Sokaki Masyeri this evening, beheld Tokalji's party carry in a bundle in a sack, which was a body. I have hastened that you should know it."

Nikka clasped his hand.

"It is well, my uncle. I thank you for the news. This is the night of blood of which I have spoken. We shall all dip our blades before the sun rises to-morrow."

"My heart is glad," replied Wasso Mikali, with flashing eyes. "My young men's knives are eager. Their hands are ready. What is the plan?"

Nikka turned to us.

"I must go with my people," he said. "Hugh, do you and Jack think you could keep the gang in play by a surprise attack through the drain? That would give us a chance to force the street-entrance and we should have them between two fires."

"And where am I going to be?" demanded Vernon King indignantly.

"This will be a nasty affair, Professor," returned Nikka. "You ought to stay out. We are younger men, and we are used to this kind of thing."

"Betty is my daughter, and I am as able to fight for her as any of you," answered King. "I know how to handle a pistol."

"We ought not to refuse you, you know," said Hugh. "Every man is going to count."

"I certainly expect to be counted," replied King.

"Me, too, your ludship and Mr. Nikka, sir," spoke up Watty, lunging to his feet. "Yes, I will, gentlemen. You give me another drink of that 'ere whisky or arak or whatever you call it, and I'll fight 'em all by myself. Yes, I will. And I guess I can swing a crowbar if I 'ave got a bump on my 'ead. Let me at 'em, gentlemen; only let me! That's all I arsk."

Betty in the hands of the enemy—what will be the outcome of this situation? See the conclusion of "The Bucoleon Treasure" in September EVERYBODY'S—out August 15th.

On the Desert Air

With Human Nature as It Is, How True That No Prophet Is Accepted in His Own Country

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Author of "Trodden Gold"

GORDON FRAZIER stared at the ice-bound Indiana landscape flowing by the car window. At intervals he cast a musing glance at his wife, drowsing on the couch, with Gordon, junior at her side. The winter afternoon was fading, and as the purple twilight settled over the prairie, his thoughts grew retrospective.

He surveyed the compartment contentedly, his gaze lingering for a moment on his wife's fur coat. In the mirror he caught a glimpse of himself, and adjusted his necktie. He was fastidious about his dress.

In another hour they would reach New Sparta. The years since he had left the little town for good passed rapidly in review. He chuckled. He had not been of the same stuff as the other boys—content to clerk in their fathers' stores or till their fathers' flat acres.

He thought of his own father—a good man, kindly, gentle, lovable and utterly ambitionless, utterly incapable of understanding a desire for a larger life than New Sparta afforded.

To Gordon Frazier, looking back across the years, the day of his headlong plunge into the hot, sweating turmoil of New York stood out vividly—the chance newspaper advertisement, the position in a brokerage office, the long hours of colorless toil—and then the opportunity grasped.

The smile deepened on Frazier's face. The subsoil of New York was rock—not every young plant had roots strong enough to penetrate it.

Frazier roused himself from his reverie. Half-forgotten yet still familiar scenes began to dot the landscape. He leaned over to waken his wife. He watched her tenderly as her eyes opened—exquisite eyes. What would she see with them on this, her first visit to New Sparta?

Gordon had a mental picture of his father, padding lazily about in the carpet slippers so characteristic of him. His father was as careless as Millicent was punctilious. It was probable that neither would understand the other.

Gordon, junior opened his eyes at a sudden shriek from the locomotive.

"Are we there, daddy?" he whispered drowsily.

"Almost, sonny." There were three things of which Gordon Frazier was inordinately proud—his business, his wife and this, his third-born. Of the three, he was proudest of the last. "Have a nice sleep?" he asked solicitously.

. The child nodded sleepily.

"It's so hot, daddy," he said. His eyes closed again.

"It *is* stuffy," agreed his father. "But we're almost there."

The flitting trees outside were moving more slowly, and presently, with a rasp of brakes, the train came to a stop. The maid joined them, to take Gordon, junior, and the porter came in for the baggage.

As they emerged from the drawing-room and stood waiting in the corridor, Frazier felt a touch on his arm. He turned round.

"Why, hello, Cranmer!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know you were on this train."

The other nodded.

"Evidently we're getting off at the same place, too."

"Yes. Paying a little visit to the old folks. We—" The line in the corridor moved forward, and Frazier did not complete the sentence.

"Who was that you spoke to?" asked Millicent, as they stood, a moment later, on the gravel platform of Sparta Junction.

"Oh, that was Dr. Cranmer—you know, John B. Cranmer—he's one of the biggest surgeons in New York," answered Frazier, looking anxiously round for his father. "There he is!" he cried.

They shook hands, Millicent with characteristic poise, his father a little confused. Gordon gave his father a quick glance of appraisal. He had expected shabbiness—but not to quite such a degree. His father needed a new suit badly. It pleased Gordon to resolve that he should have one immediately.

HIS mother was waiting for them at the house. There was a quick survey of Millicent, indifferently returned, an eloquent hug for himself, much hospitable flurry, and, finally, complete absorption in Gordon, junior.

Presently Gordon found himself alone with his father. They sat silently by the fire, a curious embarrassment between them. There was so much to be said—and yet really so little.

It was rather shocking to find what a stranger his father was to him. Gordon stared at him. It occurred to him to wonder why all the ambition of the family had been concentrated in himself.

"Well, how are things?" he asked finally.

"Oh, so-so."

"Business good, eh?"

"Oh—fair."

There was another pause. Then,

"The hardware business is dull in winter, I suppose," Gordon suggested briskly.

"Pretty dull," his father agreed.

"These are pretty hard times," persisted Gordon desperately. "Damned hard."

"Well, yes, they are. Still—" His father's voice trailed away.

The life of a country merchant suggested contrast with his own—the waiting for business as opposed to going after it. Gordon took up that theme. There was eager interest. He never wrote very explicitly about his doings. Wouldn't he please talk about it? Everybody was so proud of him. Andrew Waters had been over the night before. They'd talked a lot about Gordon.

"Andrew Waters"—the name lit a train of recollection in Gordon's mind. A nice chap, Andrew, though rather dull. When Gordon went to New York, Andrew went off to college. He had always wanted to be a doctor—like his father. Andrew was like the other boys of New Sparta—automatically they slipped into the ruts that their fathers had worn smooth.

"Doing well, is he?" asked Gordon.

"Oh, very well," said his father. "He has a little hospital. People come here."

Gordon smiled.

"From as far away as Terre Haute, eh?"

"Yes—and beyond. Andy's a smart boy. His wife's smart, too. Remember Elsie Leahy?"

"Elsie Leahy! For goodness' sake—that little red-headed girl?"

"Yes. An' she's got three children."

The old man lit his pipe. Things were going quite freely when Millicent and Mrs. Gordon rejoined them.

But constraint returned for a time at dinner. It was not easy to get the talk started. Gordon made a trial of the Russian situation. He found his father naive, not very well informed. His mother was less so. She didn't know what the world was coming to, she said. Why didn't somebody *do* something? Millicent asked her if she had read "Main Street." No; she hadn't. She did get *so* little time to read.

Gordon found the halting conversation drifting slowly toward himself. He was urged to talk about himself. He yielded, a little reluctantly. People who talked of themselves were usually tedious. So he tried to make his story tell the story of New York—of success—of the great, interesting world about which New Sparta knew so little. He seemed to achieve his purpose.

His mother thought it was all *wonderful*. She couldn't get *over* it, she kept saying. His father, more restrained, nodded his head expressively.

But even this topic presently exhausted itself. Neither Mr. Frazier nor his wife understood finance. Speculating, they thought, was gambling. Gordon had to be rudimentary in his explanations. Even then, they confessed a vague mistrust of Wall Street. His mother thought there was something a trifle shameful about a mortgage. Even his father was dubious, asking hesitating questions, plainly unable to understand thoroughly. Once he murmured something about "usury." Gordon found the task discouraging.

Gradually the talk shifted back to reminiscence of his boyhood. Things became easier. His father grew quite garrulous, recounting little stories of Gordon's barefoot days, not very well, repetitious and halting, but amusingly enough to make Millicent's eyes brighten with interest. His mother beamed genially, urging more pudding. There was much laughter. Did Gordie remember the time he fell into the well, and the Claypools' hired man— Millicent *must* have some real fresh eggs in the morning. City folks simply didn't know what a fresh egg was. Was there really a difference? Oh, gracious, yes! Not to be compared— And then the time he tried to recite "The Brook" in school! Never, if she lived to be a hundred, declared his mother, would she forget *that!* Gordie never had been very bookish. His going-off to the city and being so successful had been *such* a surprise.

Gordon found himself curiously flattered at the vividness with which the forgotten incidents of his childhood were recalled. The small gossip about the neighbors—Andrew Waters' success, Solly Meyer's new store—amused him vastly. It was singular with what trifling stuff people could contentedly occupy themselves. The tiny world of New Sparta seemed so ample to his mother and father. Gordon wondered what ancestral strain of restlessness had driven him out into the world. Even his success there seemed of no greater consequence to them than his fall down the Claypools' well.

WHEN they went in to toast themselves by the log fire, his mother brought out her crocheting. She was very happy, she said. It was so nice for the family to be together once more. She beamed particularly on Millicent. It pleased Gordon to see his wife lean over and pat his mother gently on the arm. Milly was splendid. She had come on this visit reluctantly, he knew. But, having come, she would play her part.

There were long contented silences, the only sound the snap and crackle of the fire. Gordon chuckled.

"New Sparta has it over New York one way, anyhow," he said. "Wood fires!"

His father shook his head.

"It—it's quieter, too."

"Quiet—yes. No doubt of that. But New York's the center of things——"

"Hush, Gordie!" interrupted his mother. "I thought I heard something."

"It's Gordon, junior." Millicent rose. "He seems to want something."

"He—he's not sick?"

"Oh, no. He was a little fretful on the train. The strangeness bothers him, I suppose."

"It's too quiet for him." Gordon laughed.

The smile faded from Gordon's lips as Millicent's absence lengthened. Presently he heard her calling softly to him from the head of the stairs, and he sprang up.

"He's so hot," she explained, when he reached her side. "He keeps asking for water."

Gordon was immediately practical.

"Have you taken his temperature?"

Millicent's reply was irrelevant.

"He complains of a pain in his side."

Gordon was exasperated.

"You should have taken his temperature. It's the first thing to be done."

"I know. But I—it——"

"I'll help you." He followed her into the improvised nursery. The child's condition seemed to him even more alarming than Millicent had intimated. He was listless, remonstrating with little vigor at the indignity of the thermometer.

Frazier took out his watch and timed the process accurately. His face lengthened as he read the instrument.

"What is it?" his wife whispered.

Striving to think quietly, he told her the reading. He wished she wouldn't stare at him with that dumb helplessness. It was rather a relief when she broke into soft tears. He took her in his arms, comforting her gently.

His mother had joined them. Trying to be matter of fact, he told her the situation.

"I'll call Andrew Waters," she said practically. "He lives just round the corner."

Frazier was not reassured.

"If this is serious, I think——"

"But Andrew will know what to do."

"Yes, yes, of course—for ordinary sickness. But this—this might be appendicitis—the pain in his side——"

For a moment—but for a moment only—

Everybody's Magazine, August, 1923

Gordon felt at a loss. Marooned in the prairies, with only a country doctor available, he was overcome with his momentary helplessness. Then his face cleared.

"People say I'm lucky. I guess I am. One of the best doctors in New York is right here in town. Cranmer—John B. Cranmer—maybe you've heard of him?"

His mother shook her head.

"But the expense, Gordie! Maybe it isn't anything—and Andrew's always so reasonable."

Gordon's teeth clicked grimly.

"I guess we won't worry about the expense."

"But, Gordie——"

"You don't understand, mother. Andrew's probably all right. But things are specialized nowadays. A chap like Cranmer in New York—right in the heart of things—specializing—well, you know what I mean. Andrew's doing a little of everything—a doctor in a little town has to. This—this might call for an operation—" A faint, half-audible cry from the tossing child furnished the impulse for action. "I'll go down and get Cranmer. He's probably at the Central House."

"But Gordie—" insisted his mother, following down-stairs. "Really, you——"

"Don't worry, mother," answered Gordon, slipping into his overcoat. "I'll have him here in no time." Before she could speak again, the front door had slammed.

FRAZIER'S luck held. He located Cranmer at the Central House.

"Heaven is certainly with me!" he exclaimed, as they got into the little car. "Just think of it—my bumping into you on the train. Gosh!"

"You came from here, didn't you?" asked Cranmer, as they neared the house.

"Left here when I was a kid," answered Frazier. "Went to New York and stayed there. Great place, New York!"

"Yes," agreed the surgeon.

"Getting away from it like this makes you appreciate it when you get back, eh!"

"I don't know," said Cranmer doubtfully. "I like a little place like this. You see, I was born in New York."

"Well—here we are." The car came to a stop before the house.

"These old houses—" began the surgeon, as he got out. "Take a porch like this. I'll bet it's pleasant in summer—pleasanter than Park Avenue—what?"

Frazier was not interested in New Sparta architecture.

"This way, Doctor," he said, leading the way up the stairs. He introduced Cranmer to the other members of the family.

The surgeon proceeded with his examination.

"Could I have a spoon—or, better, a butter-knife?" he asked a moment later.

Gordon's mother started to leave the room, but Gordon intercepted her.

"I'll get it, mother." He was aware that he was very nervous. He could not endure standing idly by the bedside, conscious of his utter futility.

When he returned with the butter-knife he realized that the tension had relaxed.

"It—it isn't appendicitis?" he whispered hesitantly.

Cranmer smiled, examining the child's throat.

"Just a little stomach upset, I think."

"You—you're sure?"

"Never *sure*," said the surgeon shortly. "I'll drop in to-morrow if you like. But I don't think you need to worry."

Millicent smiled at him gratefully.

"If you would, Dr. Cranmer."

The surgeon turned from the doorway.

"I think Mr. Frazier's mother will be your best doctor," he said, with a smile. "I'll leave the case in her hands."

"It was awfully decent of you to come over at this hour," said Frazier, when they were again in the car, going back to the hotel. "I really didn't think it was anything—but the women—they were alarmed."

"Naturally," agreed the surgeon. He shivered and drew his coat about him.

"Funny—your happening to be in town; wasn't it?" exclaimed Frazier, after a pause. "What brought you to New Sparta?"

The surgeon laughed.

"Why, a chap out here's been doing some rather unusual work in my line. I thought a week or two with him might do me some good."

"A surgeon, you mean?"

"Yes—maybe you know him. His name's Waters—Andrew Waters."

There was another long pause.

"Yes; I know him," said Frazier softly. "But not—not very well, I guess."

Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

FRANCIS LYNDE, whose latest novel, "Mellowing Money," begins in this issue, lives in a charming stone house which he and his two sons built with their own hands some years ago on the slope of Lookout Mountain, near Chattanooga, Tennessee. He had already passed his young manhood in the mechanical-traffic departments of various railroads when the urge to write came upon him so strongly that he did not hesitate to obey the call. But his friends were somewhat skeptical, especially as he lived so remote from editors and centers of publication. "Good Lord," they said to him, "if you will be idiotic enough to try to learn a new trade after your bones are all set, don't bury yourself in the mountains of Tennessee. Go and live in New York, where you can see life as it really is."

> But [he says] I didn't take their advice. I had been writing for ten years and more—and earning a living at it, too b'jing—before I ever saw the face of an editor. As a matter of fact, I've been in New York just once in twenty-five years, and on that occasion I met no more than three editors. I guess I didn't miss much, and, by the same token, so didn't the editors.

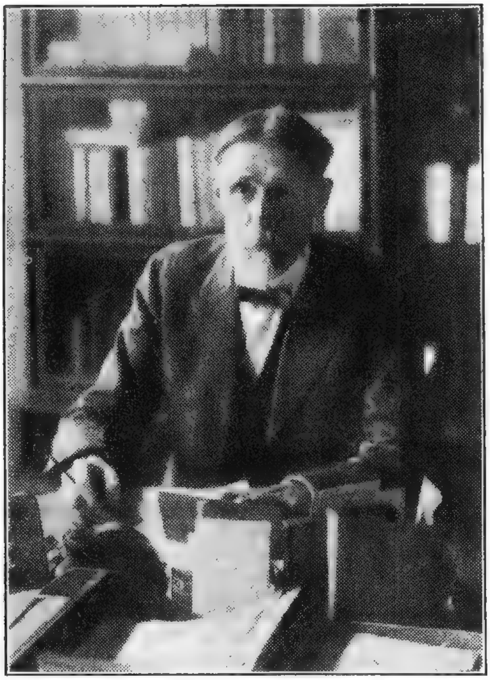
WHEN he set out on his literary career, Mr. Lynde says he made some few chartings of the course to start with, and has managed to steer by them without too many shifts of the helm. One of the chart-notes was to the effect that "I wouldn't write anything that I was afraid to sign my name to—afraid or ashamed—and another was that I'd bar subjects that couldn't be discussed or read about in mixed company."

What has been the result?

> For an output [he goes on to say] there have been twenty-seven books, mostly novels, a long string of novelettes, and short stories uncounted. People say of me that I am a dyed-in-the-wool optimist, and I am to the extent that I definitely refuse to write a story that leaves things worse than it found them. That refusal is to-day regarded as literary heresy, if one may judge by the trend of the current novel, but if so, I am quite content to be excommunicated. There are still quite a good few folk who like to read stories that try to build rather than to tear down. I've never had a "best seller," and never expect to have; if I should have, I should think something was wrong—that I had let down the bars somewhere without knowing it. On the other hand, however, I have had a steady and loyal audience almost from the beginning—people who write me letters that make me blush from the reflected warmth of their praise, people who wear my books out in the public libraries and ask for more. I call that success; don't you? The bank-account isn't the only thing in this life.
>
> For relaxation, I read other people's books and moon a bit over them weekly in the columns of a local newspaper. I like to do this because it gives me a chance to lambaste some of the rotten sex stuff that the presses are turning loose on us nowadays. Also, to give my feeble word of praise to the authors who do not feel that they have to work in a lot of libidinous stuff to make their books sell.

From the above exposition of the author's aims and views you will realize what a pleasure it is for the editors to offer so wholesome and fine a story as "Mellowing Money" to EVERYBODY'S readers. Its origin is briefly described in the subhead on page 3.

THE name of Howard Vincent O'Brien ("On the Desert Air," page 167) is much before the public just now, because his latest novel, "Trodden Gold," has been unanimously hailed as a remarkable piece



Francis Lynde, whose new novel, "Mellowing Money," begins in this issue, in his home "Wideview," near Chattanooga, Tennessee.

of work, and even classed by some as approaching very near to the long-looked-for "great American novel." Mr. O'Brien is a native of Chicago, but has a strong distaste for "young intellectuals," of whom the lakeside city has produced so many. He studied mining engineering, but gave it up because it took him three years to get through plane geometry. (Nevertheless, he has strong mechanical likings, and cannot resist the sight of a box of tools.) He has tried the advertising and publishing games, and served overseas in the world-war, coming back with the rank of lieutenant.

First started writing [he says] at very early age—twelve or thereabouts. Had a passion for printing. Also a press. What more natural than to start a magazine? It was called the *Commercial Advertiser*—probably because it was not commercial and had no advertising. Later it became the *Eaglet*, this name being chosen because the editor came into possession of a cut of an eagle.

My first serious literary work was a biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson. I picked him because I had a half-tone cut of him and saw a chance to use it. The essay was brief, because I set the type. Nothing makes more for brevity than setting your own type. If authors had to print their own books, novels would shrink out of existence.

The *Eaglet* attained a large circulation, being eventually suppressed by the school authorities for calumny.

My first "professional" writing—that is, writing for a price—was an article which won a prize in the *Travel Magazine*, describing a visit to Europe on a cattle-ship. The load was too much for *Travel* to carry. Immediately on printing my article it busted. I paid a collection agency two dollars and forty-five cents to collect my money, which it did not collect. I was years in getting back to scratch.

GARRET SMITH ("The Spirit of Peter Birch," page 77) comes from Rochester, New York, and was school-teacher and newspaper man before story-writing reached a self-supporting basis. He says of himself:

I am a writer because I can't help it. Writer's itch has tainted the blood of my line, back to the *Mayflower* at least. As a disease, however, it never became chronic or severe enough to require treatment until it reached me. The nearest previous approach to a severe case was that of a grandfather who owned a string of newspapers and took a low-down advantage of his ownership to write profusely for them.

Furthermore, I was a born liar. At that, I might have taken up law or advertising or something but for the fact that I was brought up in the same house with a Puritan grandmother, and I found out right at the start that verbal expression of my natal impulse was unpopular and unhealthful to a growing boy. Given a liar with a Puritan complex and his only natural outlet is fiction-writing. So when I was fourteen I decided on a literary career and began work on the spot and instant. My first stuff, newspaper verse, was published when I was seventeen. It wasn't till I was twenty-five, however, that I landed my first fiction. Since that time I've made a good living writing, mostly by fiction.

I've generally kept one or two side-lines going that have afforded me much amusement and rich experience, and sometimes a little money. My adventures in business include farming, salesmanship, promotion of a successful fruit-raising company, part ownership of *Progress Magazine*, of which I was editor until its demise, ownership of a newspaper syndicate and part ownership of another, part ownership of an advertising agency and a brief career as an advertising solicitor and manager. I've been as completely cured of business as I was of teaching.

Then I took up social work and public-health movements as a hobby. At various times I was executive secretary of the Babies Welfare Association, of New York city, which I helped organize, executive secretary of the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, assistant secretary of the New York Milk Committee, director of the Committee for the Reduction of Infant Mortality, executive secretary of the Rochester Public Health Association and chairman of the Board of Directors of the Churchville Convalescent Home.

Five years ago I fell in love with a little old house in the edge of the Jersey hills. I bought it and built it over. Since then the little house, my wife, my friends and my stories have been my only hobbies.

GEORGE E. HOLT ("Mescal," page 110) has made Lower California a special field for the setting of stories. This little known region lies not far from his home near San Diego, and he likes nothing better than an exploring trip through its picturesque mountains, where he meets with bad Indians, bighorn sheep, boiling springs, stone gods and lots of other interesting things. We asked him for an expression of some of his pet opinions or prejudices, and he replied as follows:

As to any opinions which I might "like to take a shot at," I am afraid it's no use. Judging from the American periodicals, most of the population of the United States would seem to be engaged in that occupation, thereby continually creating new opinions for other people to take shots at, and, besides, I suspect that I have reached the age where discretion tells me that opinions should be tentative only. I admit that I am highly entertained by the storm which has been raging over the "newer generation," and my tentative opinion concerning the question of the general depravity of the new generation is that they have called the turn on the camouflage of the old folks to the queen's taste. I, for one, am glad to see them demand they be allowed to act as individuals instead of offsprings—but I have a suspicion that most elders never do get it through their heads that a kid grows up, and that still more of them haven't the sense of humor which is better than balm of Gilead to a torn parental heart. Or possibly it's only a case of faulty memory. All of which, I hasten to add, is merely a tentative opinion, and one with which my own daughter may differ strenuously.

SOME months ago (in December "Chimney Corner") Wyndham Martyn denounced the "organized minority which is determined to do us out of tobacco." Particularly wrathy was he just then because his daughter had come home from school, where a female anti-tobacco propagandist had laid down as an axiom: "No smoker can be a gentleman." The publication of his remarks elicited some interesting comments from EVERYBODY'S readers. Most of them don't seem to care a nickel whether the human race goes to perdition through use of the fragrant weed or not, but are very much concerned with the medium in which their own respiratory systems function. The matter to them is one of manners rather than of morals. Here is a sample from Hollywood:

I demand the right to choose, so far as is reasonably possible, the kind of air that I shall breathe. The public smoker, the only one I quarrel with, insists that I shall swallow his mixture wherever he happens to take the notion to furnish it to me, in public places of my own rightful resort, where I especially demand immunity, jointly with other queer folk of my own sense of dignity, in the menace of the grossest form of insult, short of having our persons and faces spat upon, that anything resembling a regular human being could be conceivably guilty of.

ANOTHER correspondent — this time from New England—undertakes to define the limits within which a smoker can be a gentleman:

I don't think it impossible, but those who say it is impossible have much provocation. Inevitably an impulse of self-respect makes a smoker reluctant to believe that his smoke is a foul and offensive smell to so many people that in meeting strangers he must in general assume it to be offensive to them. Yet that is what he must believe and act on if he is to be a gentleman. Obviously a great many succeed in believing the theory, more comfortable for them, that their odor is either pleasant or inoffensive to so many people that the rest may be disregarded as sporadic cranks. The smoker has heard from

Howard Vincent O'Brien ("On the Desert Air," page 167) is rapidly coming to the front as a fiction-writer, but he does not train with the "young intellectuals," of whom his native city, Chicago, has produced so many.

Garret Smith ("The Spirit of Peter Birch," page 77) was a school-teacher and newspaper man before he could make story-writing pay.

three or four or a dozen women that they do not object; he assumes that they represent most women. And as for men who object, he simply despises them. He forgets that some women will tell a little lie to please the man they are with, and, what is weightier, that many of them will avoid occasions for expressing an opinion which, if they expressed it, would have to be unpleasant to the person addressed. A smoker cannot be a gentleman except by recognizing that his smoke is a stench, and acting accordingly.

THE superintendent of the Anti-Cigarette League in Southern California wouldn't go so far as to say that no smoker could be a gentleman. But—

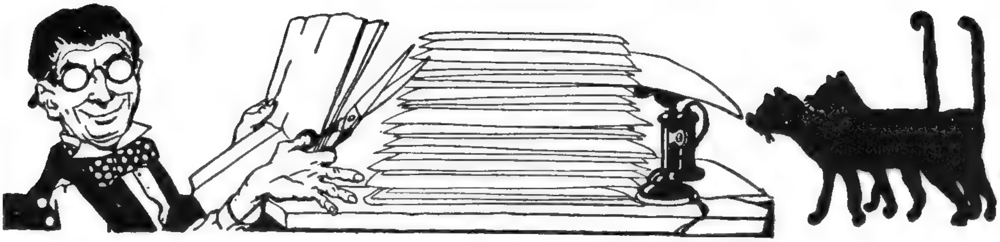
> The cigarette smoker generally is selfish and has no consideration for the rights of others. Dr. Charles B. Towne of New York city said recently: "On all sides the attitude seems to be: 'What right has any one to object to my smoking?' The matter is really on just the opposite basis: What right has any one to smoke when other people object to it? If a man feels the need of interlarding his conversation with obscenity, we say that he may not compel us to listen to him. But a smoker may with impunity pollute the air, offend the nostrils, and generally make himself a nuisance to everybody in his vicinity who does not practise his particular vice. Is not this a kind of moral obtuseness?"

IF REFORMERS are abolished could we still hope for moral progress? The editor once had something to say in "Chimney Corner" about those who object even to the mention in a story of a woman smoking a cigarette.

This brought forth the following from a lady in Detroit:

> Oh, *why* the reformer?
>
> If you are going to raise your children in absolute ignorance of the ways of the world, *how* in the world are they going to face life and successfully fill their places when they are thrown into the wild mixture of good, bad and indifferent that goes to make up humanity?
>
> Refuse to print a story whose heroine smokes? How absurd! If a girl is so weak that a short story (or a long one) can start her on a career of vice, why it's just a case of now or then. She'd surely be too weak to withstand any real temptation.
>
> Set a worthy example of a clean life and teach your children the difference between right and wrong, with a watchful eye upon their choice of companions; then you can trust them to meet temptation without falling. If the home influence is right and the teachings not too *narrow*, there is no need to call in a reformer.

George E. Holt (Mescal," page 110) has made picturesque Lower California a special field for the setting of his stories



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In court-room in Gardenville, Md.: "*Card-playing strictly prohibited.*"
In White Hall, Va.: "*Lamp & Shade.*"
In Chicago: "*One Pant Suits.*" Let's tell all the one-legged men about it.
At Sixty-ninth and Ada Sts., Chicago: "$10 *Reward for any one breaking this window.*"
At Ashland and Jackson Sts., Chicago: "*Breakfast on la Cart.*"
On Wentworth Avenue, Chicago: "*Partnership Desolation.*"
Wholesale Grocers in Clinton, Ia.: "*T. M. Gobble & Co.*"
Resident of London, Eng.: "*I. Bragg.*" Migawd! It cannot be.
On bathing-pool in South Carolina: "*Ladies taught swimming, 25 cents a lesson. Children thrown in.*"

(*Torrington, Conn., Register*)

Mrs. Elbert B. Wade, who was hanged May 20th for the murder of George B. Nott, was in conference with State's Attorney Homer S. Cummings to-day, and later it was reported that she might be called as a witness.

The other knot must have slipped.

(*Editorial in Washington, D. C., Herald*)

Girls with experience in country schools in near-by Maryland and Virginia form excellent material from which city teachers can be molded. She comes to the District and is disillusioned. She finds that the cost of loving is twice or thrice that to which she is accustomed. (MISS E. S. S.)

The back country for me—*way* back!

(*Delavan, Ill., Advertiser-Times*)

Mr. and Mrs. John Wiemer, prominent people of our city, have a baby and they got it in Peoria. It is three weeks old and a girl, the sweetest little lassie you ever saw. Mrs. Wiemer is extensively engaged in the raising of chickens.

"And the moon rose over the city, behind the dark church tower."

(*Chicago Tribune*)

FOR SALE—Combination kitchen-range, baby-bed, buggy, dresser. 5812 N. Fairfield.

Why not call up Mrs. Wiemer above?

(*New York Tribune*)

ESCAPES TRIAL, BUT GETS STERN REBUKE

Ouch!

(*Oakland, Cal., Post-Enquirer*)

McGee, the driver of the bank machine, was virtually murdered, as he was killed with a shotgun that almost tore his head from his body. (J. E. P.)

Well, I should say that he was at least virtually disturbed.

(*Auburn Park Booster*)

FOR SALE—NEW SQUIRREL CAPE, BELOW hips, $190. Stewart 6679.

Yes; but what'll keep my sash from freezing?

(*On menu of Hartford, Conn., restaurant*)

HOW TO KILL AN OYSTER

Don't drown him deep in vinegar,
  Or season him at all;
Don't cover up his shining form
  With pepper like a pall.
But gently lift him from his shell,
  And firmly hold your breath;
Then with your eager tongue and teeth
  Just tickle him to death.

But be careful he don't scratch you on the way down.

Copyright, 1923, by Gridley Adams.

(Sheboygan, Wis., Press-Telegram)

Frank Nelson, who plays the piano with his feet and at the same time plays the clarinet, will be the big attraction at the Turner Hall dance Saturday night.

Well, if he tries to add his sackseyphone and snare-drum, I just know I'll go mad.

(Waltham, Mass., News)

WANTED—To buy a double or 2-flat house with modern imps. Address M., *News* Office.
(C. E. B.)

Gee! Here's where I get rid of one of my sassy little devils.

(Springfield, Mass., Union)

PARTNER, interested in light lunch, to invest small sum. 545 So. Main St. (MRS. F. H. S.)

Noontime reveries.

(Osage, Ia., News)

WANTED—I AM IN A POSITION TO HATCH your eggs at 5c. per egg. 'Phone 626 or write RAY A. GARDNER, Osage.

He stoops to conquer.

(New York Tribune)

Andre Citroen, the man who conquered the sands of the Sahara with his caterpillar car, is to build a plant in this country and give Henry Ford a brush as a producer of cars for the multitude.

Better call it "Citroenilla," so the other insects won't sting it to death.

(Divorce Suits on the dockets)

Allfree v. Allfree—(Eventually, why not now?)
Papa v. Papa—(What happened to Mumma?)
Knight v. Knight—(Testimony will probably be illuminating.)
Hellmus v. Hellmus—(As is usual—and then some.)
Fites v. Fites—(Well, it takes two; doesn't it?)

(Lipscomb, Tex., Limelight)

Revived again? What's this the Busy Town is trying to pull off on the q.t.? From the various direction and coming from the most unthinkable places we hear the tooty-toot-toot of the horn or the ping-pingy-ping of Clarenett, Cornett or something, that will make the noise. But praise the Lord, we're are glad if it is so. He'rs hoping that the Busy Town folks will get behind the toot of the horn and push so bloomin' hard, she can't help but be a full-grown BAND. Hurrah for the idea! Get busy while it's hot.

Sure! But take a club, hammer—ANYTHING!

(Denver Post)

WILL GENTLEMAN IN GOOD CIRCUMstances loan young lady? Not ordinary case. Prefer Mason. Box 2, G277-*Post.*

No? Most extrowdinary!

(Goldendale, Wash., Sentinel)

Services at 7:30, Sunday night.
Subject, "Hell, a Place of Eternal Punishment."
All are welcome. WALTER O'HARA, Pastor.
(MISS H. R.)

After you, Alphonse.

(Lipscomb, Tex., Limelight)

Last Friday morning no chapel program had been prepared, so we spent a very delightful half-hour in singing and listening to the "Burnswick."

Yes; the change *was* such a relief.

(New York Tribune)

HIPPOPOTAMI KEPT TUT-ANKH-AMEN AWAKE.

A piece of papyrus just translated by the British Museum shows that King Tut-ankh-amen suffered from insomnia. The papyrus tells of a quarrel the ancient monarch had with the owner of the beasts over whether the king's slumber should be sacrificed to their physical comfort. How the dispute was settled is not disclosed.

Not disclosed? Tut, tut! Why, old Doc. M. Balmer cured him of that 5000 years ago.

(Adv. of Frank Frazier, Follett, Texas)

SAY, DO YOU
know that we have no hands a nifty line of Safty Hatch and Old Trusty Incubator. It is getting that time of year that you will be wanting tender chiken for breakfast—if you have not seem them yet come in and we will be glad to show them to you along with our line of other hardware.

Yes; I bit into one of them tough ones once.

(Falmouth, Ky., Outlook)

A little daughter, Miss Hilda, arrived Feb. 18th, at the home of Wilber Plummer and good wife (*née* Shafer). Papa Wilber is actually so elated that his overalls are so tight that the buttons are flying off, and Grandpap Philip is walking erect and dancing the dog-trot.

No 13 is enjoying this pretty spring like beautiful Lord's day at the home of his boyhood friend, A. S. Webster, and good wife, at their beautiful valley farm down in the Sandy Island district, where the spring flowers will soon be profuse and the robins nest again, and the pearls as of yore will be as bright as the silver moon. (MRS. O. B. P.)

Say—somebody open that window, quick!

Everybody's Chestnut Tree

EDITOR'S NOTE: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

SIR AUCKLAND GEDDES, the British ambassador at Washington, said at a recent dinner:

"Young men rise easily from the ranks here in America because the American spirit is so democratic. In Europe, now, it is different. One day a clerk remarked to his employer, 'I think we are going to have rain, sir.' '*We?*' snarled the employer. '*We* are going to have rain? How long have you been a member of the firm?' "

MARGARET is only seven years old, but sometimes quite naughty. On one occasion her mother, hoping to be particularly impressive, said,

"Don't you know that if you keep on doing so many naughty things, your children will be naughty, too?"

Margaret dimpled and cried triumphantly,

"Oh, mother, now you've given yourself away!"

SOME ruralites were talking of the strange sights to be seen in a great city, and one paid tribute to New York.

"I don't believe any one of you could think of any combination of circumstances that hasn't at some time occurred on the streets there," he said.

"I reckin I know of one that's never occurred there," said Si Wilson.

"What's that?" asked the other curiously.

"I guess," said Si slowly, "that you've never seen, nor ever will see, a brass band that's goin' in one direction and the heft of the folks goin' in the other."

MR. WILLIAMS had made a long search for a certain book and finally soliloquized:

"At last! Here it is. I wonder why one always finds a thing in the last place in which one hunts."

"I expect, dad, it's because when we find what we're looking for we stop hunting," remarked his young son.

A SILVER dollar and a one-cent piece once started an argument, which deteriorated, as so many disputes do, into the purely personal. At this stage, the big coin thought it would squelch its opponent beyond resuscitation by declaring,

"I am one hundred times as good as you are—one hundred times as good as you are."

But the insignificant cent came back at him with:

"The hell you are! I go to church every Sunday."

SHORTLY after Detroit's motor ordinance went into effect, a policeman hailed a lady driving a limousine on the boulevard and ordered her to report at nine o'clock the next morning.

"The very idea! Why?" exclaimed the lady.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," insisted the bluecoat; "but you were going forty miles an hour."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the lady indignantly. "Why, I haven't been out an hour yet."

The cop said that this was a new one on him, and he crossed the memorandum off his tab.

"**D**INNIS," said Mike, "can yez tell me why they always have a rooster an' niver a hen on top of thim barns fer a weathervane?"

"Sure!" said the other. "'Tis t' avoid the difficulty iv collictin' the eggs."

"**B**ROTHER JOHNSON," said the parson, "cain't you-all donate some small contribushun to de fund for fencing in de culud cemetery?"

"I dunno as I kin, parson," replied Brother Johnson. "I don't see no use in a fence round no cemetery. You see, them what's in there cain't git out, and them what's out sho' doan' wanta git in."

MRS. JAY: Tom says that Mazie is too temperamental to make a happy home for a man. What is "temperamental," anyway?

MR. JAY: Hm. See that woman crossing the street—the one with a baby in her arms—carrying a market-basket—and two children clinging to her skirt?

MRS. JAY: Yes.

MR. JAY: Well, she isn't temperamental.

A STRAPPING woman boarded a trolley car in Rye, New York, settled into a seat and paid her fare. The car had not traveled more than five blocks when she rose and rang up a cash fare. Whereupon the conductor strode up to her.

"Madam," he demanded, "do you know that I must turn in every fare rung up upon that register?"

"Certainly!" the woman replied, throwing open her coat and showing a badge. "Meet the new inspector."

A NORTHERN man, spending the summer in the South, went to see the last game of a series between two local teams. For a time he could not observe any umpire, but at last he spied him sitting up in the grand stand among the spectators.

"Great guns, man!" the Northerner exclaimed to a native. "What's the umpire doing up in the grand stand?"

"Well," the native explained, "the spectators used to accuse him of bum work so much that he allowed that if the folks up in the grand stand could see every play so durned good, he'd better go up there to do his umpirin'."

"**B**ALD heads," philosophized the bald-headed man, "are caused by overworking the brain."

"Ha!" cried Mr. Henpeck. "That must be why women have no hair on their chins."

A REPORTER from a near-by city had been assigned to cover the funeral of a great but crotchety old man who, among other things, had died possessed of a flourishing morning newspaper. The reporter, on his arrival in town, went to the city editor of this paper and asked how he was to break into the funeral. The city editor replied:

"Don't know—and don't care. The old man had no consideration for me—didn't he go and die for the evening papers?"

TWO gentlemen of Hebraic extraction, joint owners of a Ford, were haled into Squire Yerkes' court at Millbourne on the charge of driving at night with only one headlight.

The Hebraic gentlemen pleaded guilty and were fined ten dollars and costs.

"Vell," said one of the partners, "the easiest vay to settle the matter is for each of us to pay half. Ve both own the car, and we vas both in it."

"No, no!" exclaimed the other. "My side vasn't out! My side vasn't out!"

A SALESMAN who was determined to sell a bill of goods to a shrewd old Yorkshire merchant had talked in his hardest, most eloquent and persuasive way for nearly an hour. Finally the merchant seemed to be convinced that the line was just what he wanted, and the traveler felt amply repaid for his extra effort. But the Yorkshire man added, reflectively:

"There's ma lad Jock. Ah'd laike him to hear what ye have to say. Will ye coom this evenin' an' go over your talk again?"

The traveler gladly assented to the proposition, and at the appointed hour presented himself again for the interview with father and son. Again he went over the forceful selling-points of his line. Never had he put forth a more persuasive argument or a finer selling-talk. When he had finished, the old man turned to his son most enthusiastically and said:

"Do you hear that, Jock? Well, now, that's the way I want ye to sell our goods on the road."

Are You Happy?

ASK a hundred people what they want most in the world and the answer is likely to be —Happiness. To some, Happiness is represented by riches or fame. To others, leisure spells Happiness. But all agree that there can be no real Happiness without Health.

Summer is the time to build for Health and Happiness—the time of vacations. Long days to rest in—to play in—to dream in.

Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn were the ideal vacationists. They took a vacation whether they needed it or not—and had *fun*.

—This is what a real vacation means. To vacate your old environments, your regular occupation —your everyday self and have a complete change.

To do the things that will fill you brimful of energy and "pep".

In planning your vacation—and of course you will take one—try to get away from the things you have been doing all year and do the opposite.

The Postman Does Not Need a Walk—

He needs a hammock and a lazy time. The town man needs the quiet of the country—the country man needs the stimulus of the town.

The mountaineer needs the ocean—the lowlander needs the hills. Women who keep house should board—and girls who never see a kitchen throughout the year should camp out and get their own meals.

One man needs solitude —another needs company.

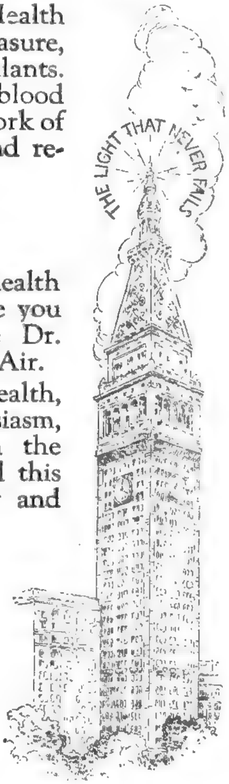
Think of your own needs and plan the vacation that will do you most good.

New ideas—new scenes—new people—all this is recreation. And recreation is necessary to Health and Happiness. Joy, pleasure, laughter are mental stimulants. They increase the flow of blood and so aid in the first work of building up the body and repairing wasted tissues.

Miracle-Workers—

There are two famous health doctors whom we advise you to consult. They are Dr. Sunshine and Dr. Fresh Air.

If you want more health, more energy, more enthusiasm, more earning power in the days to come, play hard this month of August—play and be happy.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

During the past few years a great new movement has been growing all over the country —the movement to provide recreation and outdoor amusements for the thousands of men, women and children who live in towns, villages and thickly populated cities. This vacation movement has been carried along by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. In 1922 many of our district managers arranged jolly old-fashioned picnics for their local policyholders.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company is so strongly in sympathy with this movement that it has prepared a booklet, "What One Town Did", that tells just how to go about the work of providing adequate recreation centers.

Please send for it and help enlist the interest of your neighbors in plans for building health in your town.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

Published by

METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY—NEW YORK

Biggest in the World, More Assets, More Policyholders, More Insurance in force, More new Insurance each year

O. Henry lunged forward, the don flashed his stiletto, the senorita screamed— *but*—

Al Jennings, outlaw and train-robber was too quick on the trigger. Let him tell you the amazing story of O. Henry's bohemian career.

She was a born flirt, the Senorita. Just the glance of a dark eye over her fan, behind the back of the princely don. In its wake came livid passion, death, riot—and breathless flight for O. Henry and Al Jennings, the most picturesque pair of adventurers since the days of Captain Kidd.

Al Jennings and his brother Frank had stepped off a boat at Honduras. They wore top hats and dress suits—the only garb they had. They were outlaws, with prices on their heads. Al walked up to the American consulate. On the veranda sat a figure dressed immaculately in duck. It was O. Henry, penniless, yet unconcerned. O. Henry was not there for local color. He, too, was a fugitive from justice. For what crime? Let Al Jennings tell you, as only he can, in his inimitable memoirs.

"Colonel, we meet again"

Years later, after Jennings had been trapped and lay in a cell in the Ohio Penitentiary, one day he heard a familiar voice. He looked up and there—in prison stripes, too—was O. Henry. "Colonel," said O. Henry, in his Southern drawl, "it seems we meet again!"

Then follows what is certainly the most remarkable biography in American literature. Why was O. Henry imprisoned? There is no doubt he was innocent, but the story is too long to be told here. In any case, in the midst of the degrading prison life, O. Henry began to write. Jennings tells about his first story, how when he read it to two hardened convicts they blubbered for the first time in their lives. He tells how there, in prison, O. Henry got the material for some of his most famous stories. Among other things, you read the pathetic story of the *original* of the immortal Jimmy Valentine.

Out of Prison Into Fame

All through his career O. Henry was an enigma. Editors could never make him out. The Four Hundred opened its doors to him, but he was not to be netted. A strangely reserved figure, except to the few who knew him. Now at last Al Jennings gives the world the key to this enigma.

You see what the incidents were that shaped O. Henry's character—not only in colorful Central America, and in the penitentiary, but later also in all the byways of that modern Bagdad — New York — where O. Henry wandered tirelessly, as did Haroun Al Raschid of old.

How Can Such Things Be?

"Through the Shadows with O. Henry" is a book of life, not fiction. In that fact lies its inexpressible fascination. One gasps at every page. Here is, truly, a picture of his country that no American can afford not to read. For Al Jennings is, in his way, no less a remarkable man than O. Henry. You read of a childhood as pathetic as Oliver Twist's, a young manhood more exciting than any Western fiction ever penned, full of tales of wild Western feuds, of train and bank robberies, of hair-breadth escapes.

And it is about *real* men and women, not puppets of fiction; you see on one page the lovable but always strange character of O. Henry—you see Roosevelt, Mark Hanna, prominent New Yorkers—and then on other pages are the figures of desperados, convict bankers, pickpockets, fallen women, burglars, murderers! Each one with a personality so picturesque, with a history so vivid and often pathetic, that one marvels that such things can be! It is an astonishing *tour de force!*

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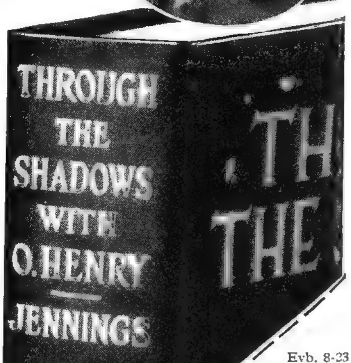
"A little bundle of energy, with flaming red hair and piercing eyes" — that's the picture a friend gives of Al Jennings, ex-outlaw, who has written this fascinating account of his own, and O. Henry's career.



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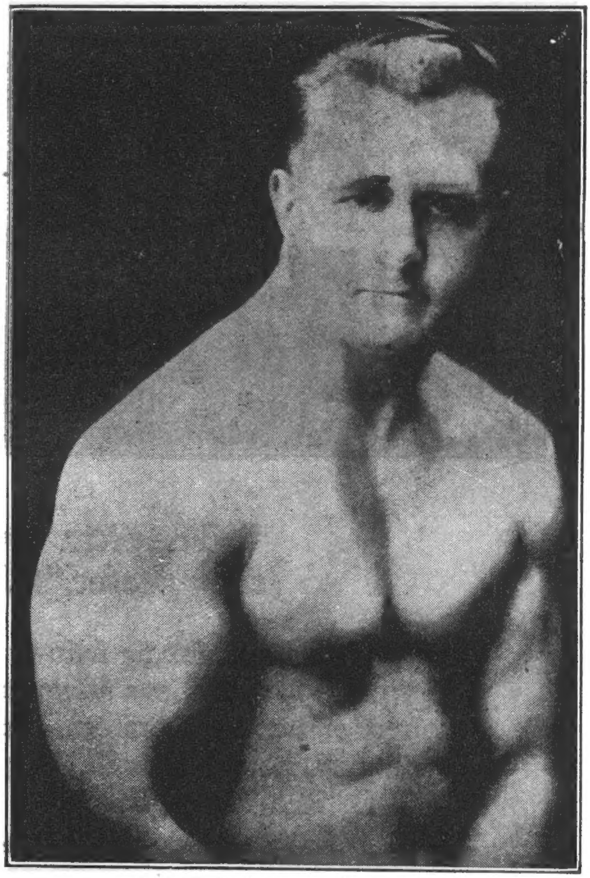

Earle E. Liederman as he is to-day

Up in the morning brimming with pep. Eat like a kid and off for the day's work feeling like a race horse. You don't care how much work awaits you, for that's what you crave—hard work and plenty of it. And when the day is over, are you tired? I should say not. Those days are gone forever. That's the way a strong, healthy man acts. His broad chest breathes deep with oxygen purifying his blood so that his very body tingles with life. His brain is clear and his eyes sparkle. He has a spring to his step and a confidence to tackle anything at any time.

Pity the Weakling

Don't you feel sorry for those poor fellows dragging along through life with a neglected body? They are up and around a full half hour in the morning before they are half awake. They taste a bite of food and call it a breakfast. Shuffle off to work and drag through the day. It's no wonder so few of them ever succeed. Nobody wants a dead one hanging around. It's the live ones that count.

Strength Is Yours

Wake up fellows and look the facts in the face. It's up to you right now. What do you plan to be—a live one or a dead one? Health and strength are yours if you'll work for them, so why choose a life of suffering and failure?

Exercise will do it. By that I mean the right kind of exercise. Yes, your body needs it just as much as it does food. If you don't get it you soon develop into a flat-chested, narrow-shouldered weakling with a brain that needs all kinds of stimulants and foolish treatments to make it act. I know what I am talking about. I haven't devoted all these years for nothing. Come to me and give me the facts and I'll transform that body of yours so you won't know it. I will broaden your shoulders, fill out your chest, and give you the arms and legs of a real man. Meanwhile, I work on the muscles in and around your vital organs, making your heart pump rich, pure blood and putting real pep in your old backbone. This is no idle talk. I don't promise these things—I guarantee them. If you doubt me, come on and make me prove it. That's what I like.

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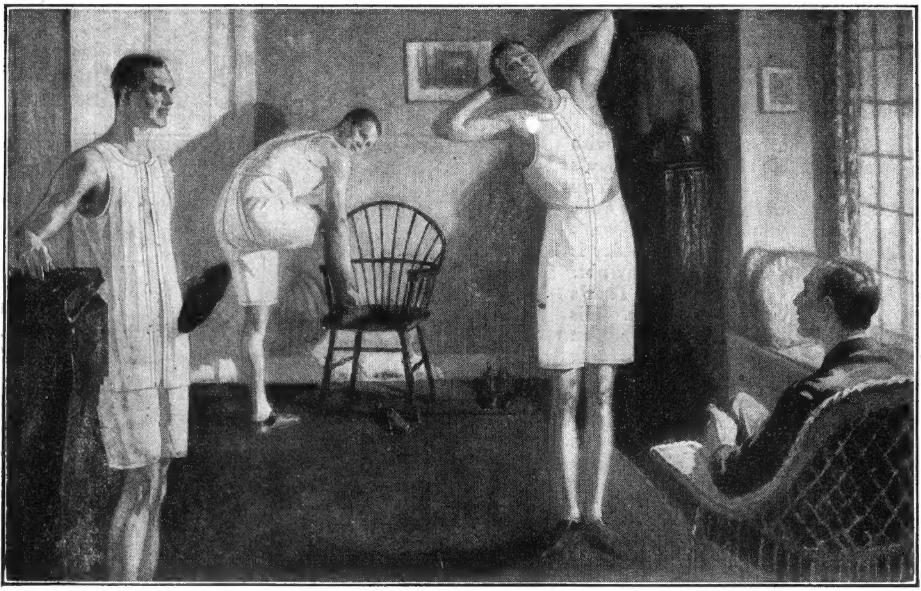

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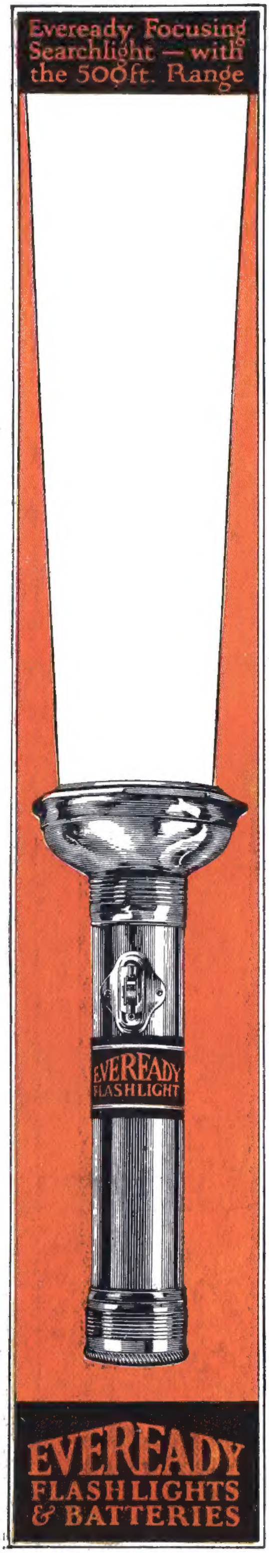
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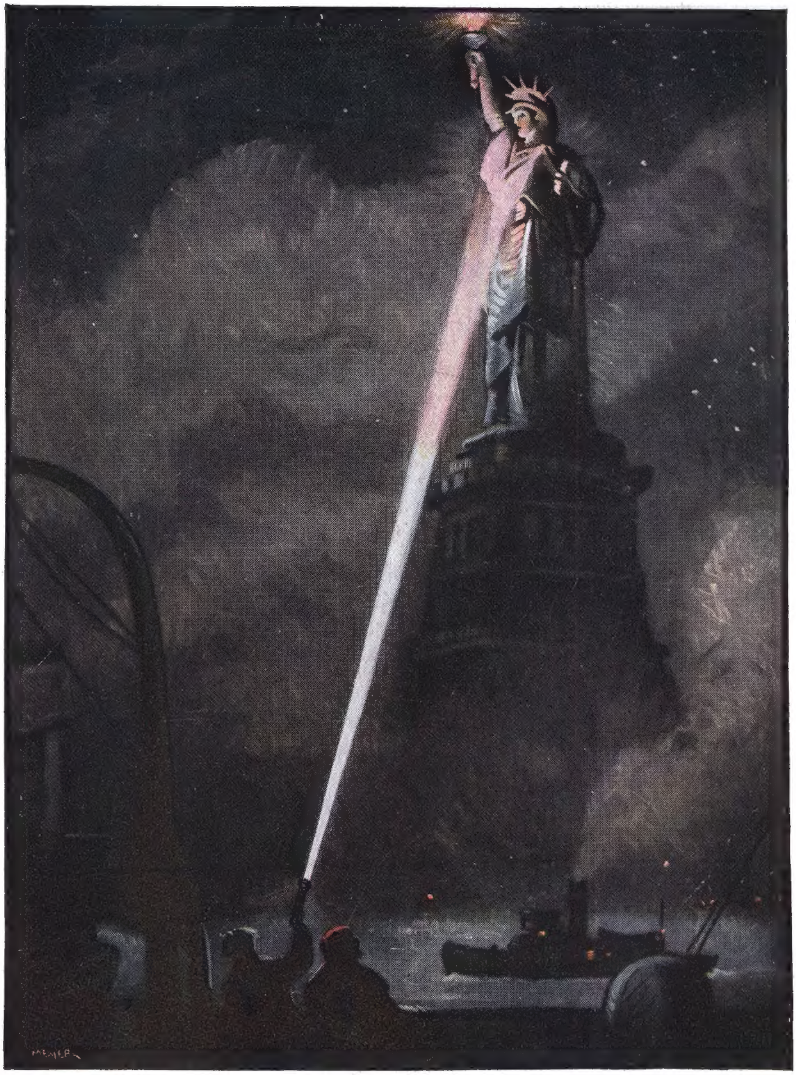

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